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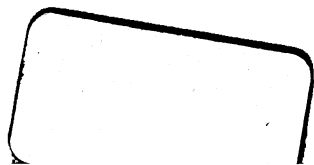
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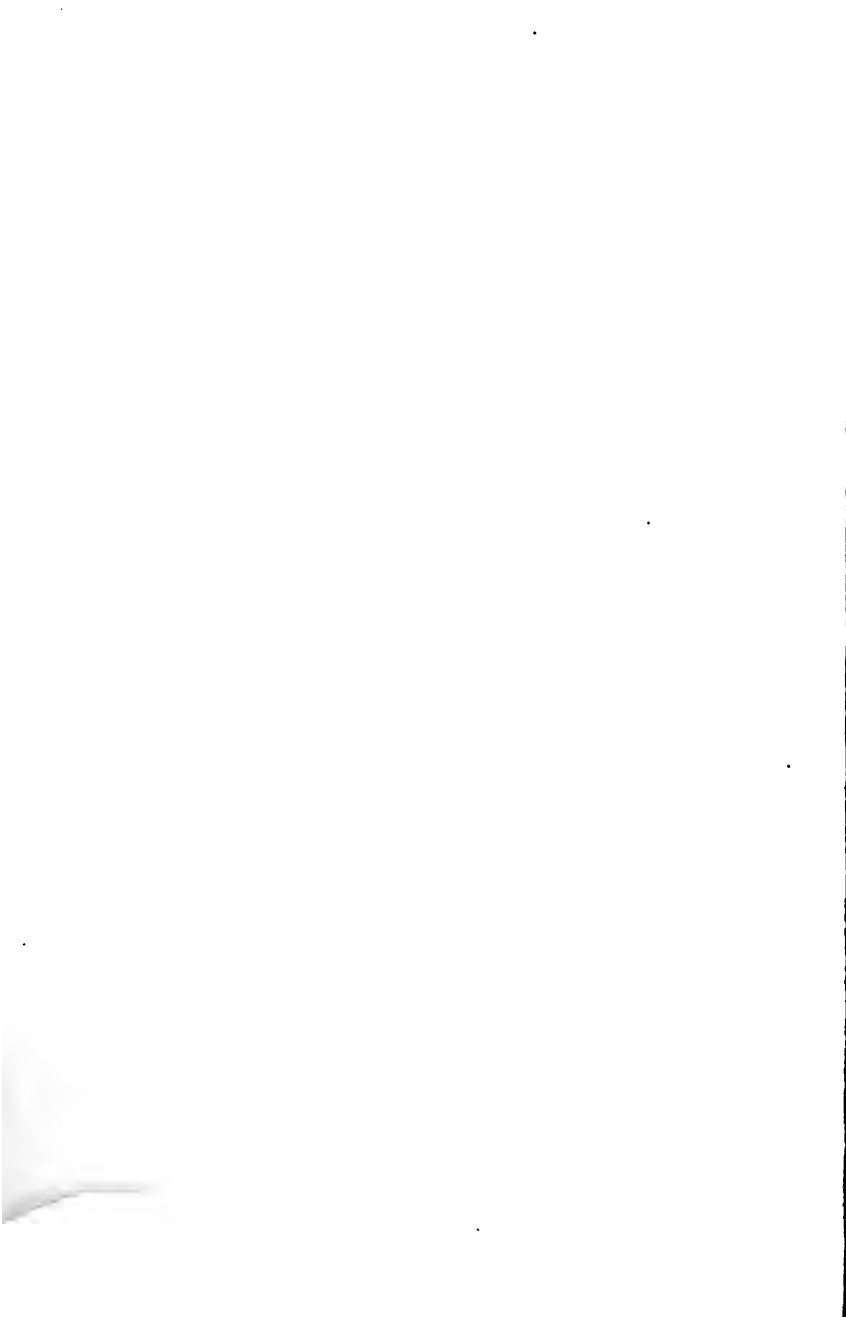
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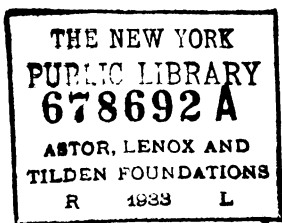
By HENRY C. ROWLAND



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Dues

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Chapter I

THE raid was begun with such swift stealth, to be then carried on in so silent and vicious a manner that Captain Phineas Plunkett, passing the house at that moment, was shocked and startled.

It was on that widest of fronts where the public peace is never permanent—the water front. This particular sector was a shabby-genteel street in South Brooklyn, where the grass sprouts between the paving stones, and the jungle of back yards borders on a No Man's Land inclosed in hoardings and containing everything under the sun that is not immediately required, a sort of manufacturing catch-all. The hour was one o'clock of a raw, late February morning and Captain Plunkett was returning from the bedside of a lonely friend who was convalescing poorly from the flu.

The first warning of the rumpus came with a swift scurry of feet and the sudden appearance of dark figures, some of which rushed up the low stoop of the house at the end of the block while others whipped round it for a flank attack. The front door held by its new bolts and yielded by its rotten hinges, and a moment later there came from within a muffled diapason of protesting voices, curses, blows, the crash of breaking furniture, and other sounds which promised occupation for those whose business lies in the reparation of people and things.

Captain Plunkett stood stock still. "A police raid," said he to himself; "and a nasty one."

He frowned and stood listening to the noises which indicated plainly a lack of polite methods within. No shots were fired, but he could hear heavy scuffings, stifled cries, the surging about of struggling bodies, with savage orders and a smothered scream or two.

As a born and bred New Yorker and man about town of previous sporting habits he had witnessed raids before, even been gilled once in the net spread round a roulette game, but he had never witnessed such silent ferocity as

was here. A lower window was raised and a man was halfway through when Captain Plunkett saw him seized from behind, and heard the club drop on the back of his bare head. Two of the plain-clothes men came from the rear, carrying an unconscious form which they laid on the wet sidewalk. One of them blew a police whistle and far down the dismal street a patrol wagon appeared, moving slowly toward the house.

The policemen went back to the rear—no doubt to fetch a fresh victim, thought Captain Plunkett in anger and disgust. As the sole disinterested witness of the brutal affair he determined to take some action. He was a kind-hearted young man. Most of his friends considered him a bit soft, but his college nickname of Phœbe was not entirely on this account. It had its origin rather in the classic beauty of his features and wavy yellow hair, which with a pair of vivid blue eyes had led to his being dubbed Phœbe Apollo Plunkett, then Phœbus, then Phœby, the affectionate diminutive construed by most as Phœbe, which on the whole seemed not inept. One sees that the first was an almost inevitable student play upon his full name of Phineas Appleton Plunkett. He

glanced now at the inanimate form upon the sidewalk, that of a well-dressed man, and was about to render first aid and otherwise actively interfere in the interest of humanity when a dark figure came flitting up the basement steps and he found himself seized by the elbow and a soft voice tremulous with fear murmured beseechingly: "Oh, please help me out of this! Pretend I'm with you! Walk on slowly."

It was not in Phineas to refuse. Disgusted as he was at this ruthless method of conducting a raid he would cheerfully have rescued all its victims, let alone a single and, as he could see by the glare of the distant street lamp, very pretty one.

"All right," said he; and tucking her hand under his arm he moved slowly away. The patrol wagon rolled past. Two men came out onto the stoop of the house.

"Hold on there youse!" called one of them, and ran down the steps.

Phineas faced about. "Well, what is it?" he demanded in a voice which no amount of practice could infuse with military stridency nor from which it could eliminate the lisp which came with strong emotion. But

it did not matter, the sight of his officer's cap being sufficient. The man muttered something and went back.

Phineas and his companion moved slowly down the street.

"That sort of thing is a beastly outrage," said he. "They don't need to club people insensible. What is it anyhow? Gambling joint?"

The girl shook her head, and Phineas did not pursue his inquiries. He was beginning to realize that he had run a very serious risk of what might easily have got him into a peck of trouble. They passed under a street lamp, and glancing curiously at his companion he was unable to detect any of the insignia of vice. Much puzzled Phineas walked on in silence. The chance he had taken in rescuing her had not been inspired by chivalry or gallantry but merely because he was incensed at the brutality of the raid. But now his curiosity was roused and it must be admitted that Phineas was a bit of a meddler. He had a talent which amounted almost to a genius for getting himself mixed up in the unfortunate affairs of others, and this not long before had got him into serious trouble.

Presently they reached a station of the "L" and Phineas paused. "I am going to New York," said he tentatively.

"So am I. Madison Square."

"That's where I get off," said Phineas truthfully. "We'll go together if you don't mind?"

"I don't know how I can thank you for what you've done for me," she answered. "I was an awful fool to go to that place—but it wasn't what you probably think."

"Whatever the offense," said Phineas, "a raid like that is a disgrace."

And he led the way up the steps. They were just in time to catch a New York train, and in the brightly lighted and nearly empty car he observed his companion more comprehensively. Though he was a keen judge of metropolitan types the girl perplexed him. She was uncommonly pretty and of a Slavic look, he thought, with widely spaced gray eyes, a short straight nose, and a mouth that was firm though rather full-lipped. Her skin was very white and fine. In fact, she impressed him as the finished product of some very old race, not Semitic nor Oriental, but which had been bred close to the pure strain for genera-

tions, like Balkan gypsies. But she was no Tzigane.

Her clothes were like herself, unmixed in quality of texture. Phineas, a bit of an expert in a purely amateur way, saw at a glance that there was no sham about the stylish tailor-made suit, the lace-embroidered blouse, Siberian sable trimming of her round hat and silver fox round her neck. And yet he had just rescued this bit of elegance slipping out of the basement of a raided house.

She seemed to read his thought and asked with a smile: "What ever possessed you to take a chance like that?"

Phineas shrugged. "Their work was too raw for my taste. It offended the principles that led me to enter the Army. I once upset a dog catcher's wagon and let out all the dogs for the same reason. Those brutes back there made me want to start a little war of my own. Too bad I didn't—since I've missed out on the big show," he added.

"Have you been in the Army long?"

"Not long enough to take the crease out of my clothes; and next week I get mustered out."

"And then?"

"Hanged if I know. Anything that promises some of the great adventure I'd set my heart on and didn't get. For a reasonable stipend, of course."

"That's funny." The remark was in a low voice and as if addressed to herself.

"I'm glad you think so," said Phineas. "I think it's sad. What is there about it that strikes you as funny?"

"Well—for one thing you don't seem like the adventurous sort. And for another I would have said that you had never done a day's work in your life."

"I hadn't until my father came a cropper when the country went to war."

"I've seen you lots of times going up and down Fifth Avenue. Would you mind telling me who you are?"

"Not if you will honor me ——"

"Well then, my name is Olga Karakoff. My father is the dealer in antiques."

"Of course. Used to be Petrovski. My family has dealt there for years and years. I'm Phineas Plunkett."

"Not Phœbe Plunkett?" Her voice rose but she hushed it quickly with a look of burning interest at her rescuer.

"I see that I am advertised by my loving friends," said Phineas sadly.

"Your friends may have started it, but I was thinking of your newspaper —"

Phineas shuddered. "Don't," said he. "I am trying to forget. Yes, you are right. The paper finished it—and me. In fact we sawed it off pretty evenly, as I came within one jump of finishing the paper. They were lucky to get off with a hundred-thousand-dollar damage suit, which is now appealed. But it was their own fault. They told me to get the inside of that graft story and I got it. The trouble lay in my telling how I got it. That was a bit of inexperience on my part and carelessness on the part of the city editor; and it cost us both our jobs."

Olga stared at the handsome but, in the opinion of many, rather vapid features of the young man, and her light gray eyes had a peculiar expression of eagerness, one might almost say of cupidity. It was such a look as might have been seen on the face of a collector, a naturalist, who has suddenly caught sight of a rare orchid on an inaccessible ledge.

"Papa said it was one of the cleverest pieces of detective work that had come under his ob-

servation for a long time," said she. "How did you know where to start? You didn't tell that."

"Oh, I worked backward from x , the unknown quantity. I suppose I must have a natural gift for deduction, and being a born meddler it wasn't long before I turned up a clew. Maybe I'll set up for a private detective if I can't find honest employment. To tell the truth, I'm open to almost any sort of criminal proposition. Since I can't be a hero now that the war is over I might as well be a black-guard. Well, here's our station."

They left the train and went up and out into the raw soggy night. Phineas offered to see her to her door, which was not far. As they crossed Madison Square he asked again if she could not tell him anything about the peculiar character of the house from which she had been the only occupant to escape, being now convinced that its commerce was far more serious than he had thought.

"Not to-night," she answered, smiling. "I shall have to consult papa first. He has no idea that I knew about the place, and I am in for a good scolding. Now listen, captain ——"

"Oh, thank you! Thank you!"

"Did you really mean it when you said that you were looking for a dangerous well-paid job?"

"I certainly did, Miss Karakoff. 'Adventurous' was the word I used, but we'll waive that. Do you happen to need the services of a bodyguard or bravo or private assassin or something of the sort?"

"Not right away, I hope. But I'm not joking captain. Will you dine with papa and me tomorrow night at eight? I think I can tell you all about this night's business then—and maybe you will find the job you are looking for."

"You're awfully kind. Yes, with much pleasure."

"Then I'll count on you. Where are you stopping, at your club?"

"Alas, no. I've had to drop all my clubs. You see, I've not only myself but my father to support. He's in a sanitarium." He gave her the name of his old-fashioned commercial hotel, adding that he was on leave in the hope of hunting up some sort of work. "If all else fails," said Phineas half jokingly, "perhaps your father might take me on as a buyer. I've lived a good part of my life in Europe and

was halfway through a course in architecture for the Beaux Arts when the war began. Then father wrote me that things were looking rickety for him and I came home. Since then it's been one darn thing after another."

"Cheer up. If what I have in mind comes off you'll get all the excitement you want. And you'll be rendering the country a greater service than if you had gone to France."

Walking rapidly they had reached the shop and paused in front of a door at one side of it. Miss Karakoff offered him her hand. "Our apartment is over the store," said she. "Thank you a thousand times. To-morrow night, then?"

Chapter II

PHINEAS did not take very seriously Olga's suggestion of possible adventurous and remunerative employment. In the first place he could not imagine what use an importing merchant could possibly have for such service, and in the second, he had that greatest of all handicaps to a young man looking for a job—a supreme contempt for his own general qualifications.

As a matter of fact these were not brilliant from a business point of view. Most gentlemanly accomplishments attained at great expense are, curiously enough, such as to fit one indifferently well for employments of a semimenial character. Phineas might have qualified as a riding master, chauffeur, racing skipper, dancing teacher, athletic instructor, butler or barkeep. His college education had been academic, but it is doubtful if he could have taught grammar school. He had barely managed to save his skin through two years of preparatory courses in architecture for the Beaux Arts.

As a result of all this, Phineas' job-hunting

efforts were a good deal like those of Kim's red Lama in search of a river or some of the Knights of the Round Table riding pleasantly about in search of the Holy Grail. Going down the line of such of his friends as were in town amounted to no more than a series of social calls paid at inconvenient hours, and after being staved off for the eleventh time with a lunch or dinner invitation Phineas grew peeved.

"Confound it," said he, "I didn't come for anything so picayune as mere food. I'm looking for employment, honest if possible but fairly remunerative."

Late in the day he returned to his hotel with a low estimate of friendship and the conviction that a man looking for a job was generally regarded as a worse pest than a man with the flu. The latter was to be shunned but the former instantly deported. His lack of success brought him to a more thoughtful consideration of his adventure of the night before. Olga had impressed him as a sensible sort of girl and there might be something in it after all. He had been able to find nothing about the raid in the papers, and Phineas set himself to solve the problem of what it might

have been, finally arriving at a conclusion by a process of elimination.

His estimate of Olga's personality and position made it impossible that the house could have been any sort of disreputable establishment in the ordinary sense, whether of gambling or drug dispensing or worse. But the vicious tactics of the police appeared to indicate that they considered themselves to be dealing with a dangerous group of individuals with whom it would not do to take any chances and who were not entitled to gentle handling. This would seem to put them in one of two classes—criminal or enemies of the state. Phineas reasoned that Olga as the daughter of a prominent merchant would have no reason to consort with thieves, and therefore the rendezvous must have been one of a sort to menace the public peace. It was undoubtedly a meeting of anarchists or nihilists or Bolsheviki or something of the sort.

This conclusion pointed to another. Karakoff was possibly a member of the organization who no longer approved its proceedings and was now denounced as a renegade. Fearing himself to be in personal danger he might desire a bodyguard or perhaps an unsuspected

confidential agent through whom he might strike at the core of the society to nullify its mischief.

Such a position might not have appealed to most young men of Phineas' station, but it did to him. It was, in fact, precisely the sort of work for which he was best fitted, as behind his handsome, smiling and rather vapid face there was a deal of keen native acumen, a cynical indifference to danger, and the germ of that peculiar Yankee ruthlessness inherited from pioneer Indian fighters.

It was therefore with pleasantly tingling anticipations that Captain Plunkett presented himself at the Karakoff's apartment, where he was ushered into a salon which might have passed for a room in a museum of rare and precious *objets d'art*.

Olga, exotically beautiful in a pale green evening gown too dressy for an informal dinner *en famille* and likewise too décolleté for a young girl on any occasion, welcomed him as though he had been an old friend—even more, perhaps; and presented him to her father, who was a singularly handsome man of about forty-five.

Phineas found himself immediately inter-

ested in Karakoff, who began to thank him warmly in a musical but rather high-pitched voice for the service he had rendered Olga.

"It was far more than she deserved," said Karakoff. "I can't imagine what possessed her to go to such a place. Feminine curiosity, I suppose, with a certain amount of cupidity." He smiled.

"Why cupidity?" Phineas asked.

"Ah, that's the woman of it. She knows perfectly well that she has only to help herself to what she wants from my stock of gew-gaws, which is quite considerable. The eternal feminine desire for a bargain. No doubt she inherits it from a long ancestry of merchants. You see, captain, that place was what crooks would call a fence."

"What!" exclaimed Phineas, no less startled to learn the nature of the raided house than at the frankness of his host.

"Yes," said Karakoff, smiling, "but not for stolen articles. For smuggled ones."

"Oh—I see," said Phineas, somewhat relieved.

"It appears to be a new enterprise which has sprung up since the Russian débâcle," said Karakoff, "and it is beginning to assume di-

mensions which cause us dealers a certain amount of anxiety. You see, rich Russians have always been great purchasers of valuable jewelry; more so than any other people, I suppose. Their gifts to wives and sweethearts and daughters are usually in this form. Now owing to the state of chaos in the country they have lost their estates and high-paid sinecures and even their money and securities in the banks. But they usually manage to hang on to their jewels, and these they are now forced to sell for what they may fetch."

Phineas nodded. "And that's beginning to affect your market?" he asked.

"It is going to unless this wholesale smuggling is stopped. That little place over in South Brooklyn was a mere bagatelle, but who knows how many such there may be? The trouble lies in the impossibility of preventing the individual smuggling of nondescript jewelry. You can't search every casual off a transport. You can't even keep them from getting ashore; nor the officers and crews of Dutch and Danish and Scandinavian ships. Customs officers are not clairvoyants. The clever seizures they make are the result of being tipped off from the other side. Where

these transactions are secret and the mere existence of the gems unknown it is a pretty hopeless proposition."

"Unless," suggested Phineas, "the commerce is under some general organization."

Karakoff's dark luminous eyes glowed suddenly like a live ember struck by a draft of air. He leaned forward in his chair.

"I wondered if that idea would occur to you, captain. It is precisely what some of us suspect and desire to know more about. We are looking for the proper person or persons to undertake such an investigation without the knowledge of the Federal authorities."

Dinner was at this moment announced, and Karakoff dropped the topic with a gesture of postponement. In fact, he did not bring it up again in the course of an evening which passed most pleasantly for Phineas and recalled his student days in Paris, when he had mingled with an enlivening cosmopolitan society. The Karakoffs, however, represented a class with which he had absolutely no personal acquaintanceship; that of the rich and highly educated merchant whose commerce has been augmented by succeeding generations and whose pride as well as inclination does not admit of any ef-

fort to enter a smart social stratum for which he feels a certain secret contempt.

It occurred to Phineas that here was a social world all its own, and that those not in relations with it missed a good deal of interest and pleasure from their lives. He was struck, however, by a certain disparity between Olga and her father. Karakoff gave the impression of the finished man of the world, might have passed for European nobility, royalty for that matter. His handsome presence, easy graceful manner and precision of speech distinguished him. But Olga for all her superfine finish was not distinguished any more than some voluptuous phenomenon of female beauty in a harem would be distinguished. There was something lacking, something in excess.

Phineas could not have described it in words, but he felt it to be there. She gave him the impression of temperamental instability, like a docile performing leopardess which is trained but not tamed. He had a feeling that her beautiful manners were rather like her beautiful gown, something extrinsic and to be worn as occasion might require, that they were not a part of her, an integral part

of her as in the case of women of his own world.

Then gradually as the evening wore on he became unpleasantly conscious of his having for her some peculiar fascination. Phineas was anything but vain—rather the reverse, in fact—but his instincts were keen and his experience considerable. Once or twice when their eyes met he read in Olga's that cosmic stare which is the betrayal of a swift infatuation. It was anything but a purposeful regard, not unconscious, perhaps, but uncontrollable and akin to the gleam of smoldering anger or hatred. It made him uncomfortable and he was glad when the time came for him to go. Karakoff accompanied him to the door. "Can you dine with me and some of my business confrères Thursday night?" he asked. "It will be a stag party. My daughter has told me something about your circumstances and your desire to find occupation of an interesting and profitable sort. It may be that I shall have a proposition to make you, but this of course entails no obligation on your part. It would have something to do with the matter we discussed before dinner."

"I should be delighted," Phineas answered.

He had an uncertain feeling about Karakoff, but the dealer's personality attracted him, and now the scent of adventure was distinctly in the air. "I'm afraid, though, that you are inclined to overrate my abilities."

Karakoff smiled in his attractive way. "If I do," said he, "they will have to be assayed by some of the shrewdest judges of character in this city of New York before we undertake anything definite."

And with a pleasant word or two they parted.

Chapter III

WHILE dressing the next morning Phineas' uncertain spirits were cheered by receiving an impromptu dinner invitation from a young and charming friend who a number of months previously had married a genial old gallant of enormous wealth. Phineas had himself at one time entertained a tender sentiment for this fair and gracious lady, might even have married her but for his calamitous change of expectations, when, neither of them having two sous to clink together, he had obtained employment on a daily paper and she a far more lucrative position as the pampered darling of an ancient beau:

"Dear Phæbe," read the note: "Why haven't you come to see me? I saw Doctor Bright to-day and he told me that you were in town and gave me your address. Can't you dine with us to-night at eight? Do please come as I have a charming little marquise, recently arrived with her husband on some French commission. She speaks scarcely any English, and none of the other men who are coming speak real French. I have also

a lovely mysterious girl I used to know in Paris, a Miss Melton. She pretends to be a French propagandiste, but I am not sure.

"Forgive the short notice and phone me that you can come. It is very wrong of you to keep away from your old friends merely because you can no longer burn the daylight as of old. *C'est la guerre!*

"Faithfully yours,

EVELYN OSGOOD CROSBY."

Phineas immediately telephoned to accept the invitation. After all it was nice to be remembered. Probably the most painful feature of sudden poverty from affluence in American social life is the gradual withdrawal from one's former set. It is rather like the slow death of a blasted tree; first the withering of the leaves and twigs of slight acquaintanceship, gradually descending to the branches of friendship, and then the blighting of the solid limbs of intimacy and real affection.

It seemed to Phineas that one by one his former associates had drawn back into their august palaces and that the facades of these were sheathed in a coating of ice which

needed an Alpine *pioche* to chop through. It had got so that he disliked to pass them and he had taken to frequenting other quarters of the city. Sometimes he had felt as if poverty had invested him with a new, different personality or that he had adopted one, like a criminal discharged after a long term of prison and desiring to begin his life anew. He thought it probable that in ten years' time the friends of his careless youth would be no more than echoes of a happy past.

Then like the harbinger of this new phase came a messenger to his door with a note and a small package. "No answer, sir," said he, and flitted down the corridor like a bat while Phineas was turning the envelope in his hand. He opened it and read as follows:

Mon cher ami: Please accept this souvenir of an unusual experience with my gratitude for the chivalry which saved me from disgrace. I ought to tell you that I bought it with a few other trifles just before you rescued me from those brutal men. As papa says, I got off more easily than I deserved.

I hope you will believe me when I tell you that the letters on the inside were already engraved. Like most people of Russian blood

I am rather superstitious and do not believe in mere coincidence. I wonder what it means.

Gratefully yours,

OLGA KARAKOFF.

Phineas ripped open the package, to find one of Karakoff's finely made little cedar packing boxes inclosing the usual satin case, in which lay a large and very beautiful emerald ring. It was a heavy ring such as is worn frequently by European but seldom by American men. The gold was massive and worked in a peculiar design of dolphins holding in their maws a flawless emerald deeply set, as if disdaining to exploit its size and quality.

Phineas stared at the ring with a frown, then examined its inner surface. To his astonishment he found it deeply engraved with the letters "O. à P." His frown deepened. "Olga to Phineas," he muttered. But it was plainly evident that Olga had told the truth about its being already thus inscribed, as the letters certainly were not freshly cut, their depths and edges being dull.

It was unquestionably a very valuable gift, but Phineas had not the slightest intention of

accepting a reward for the peculiar service he had rendered. He slipped the ring on his finger, which it fitted perfectly. Deciding that it was as safe there as in any other place and preferring to return it personally with his thanks and an explanation which might salve the girl's feelings, he let it remain. No doubt he could manage to have a few words with her the following night.

Phineas passed the day in a rather desultory manner, visiting his sick friend and observing as he passed the raided house that it was closely shuttered. After returning to his hotel to change his clothes he walked up to the Crosby mansion, feeling rather a fool in his spick-and-span uniform, highly polished boots and shining spurs. Nature and athletic exercises had given him a trim military figure, which with the tan of the training camp suggested a soldier returned from active campaign overseas; and Phineas felt himself an unutterable fraud at each admiring glance in his direction.

"I ought to be labeled 'Have not fought' or 'Failed to get there' or 'Too late to start' or something of the sort," he told himself disgustedly.

This, of course, was an entirely wrong feeling and it had a curious reaction, for instead of infusing him with an apologetic bearing it gave him a defiant air. He had really done his best. Though forced to claim exemption from the first draft as the sole support of a stricken parent he had finally been able to negotiate a loan which enabled him to go to Plattsburg. The happiest day of his life had been that on which he had received his commission, and the bitterest the day on which the Hun had played, to his thinking, the meanest trick of all his many—had quit, had lain down.

Phineas was warmly welcomed by Mrs. Crosby, and shortly after his arrival dinner was served. He took out an old playmate and at table found the Marquise d'Irancy on his left. She proved very bright and vivacious, sympathized with him on his hard luck in not getting to the Front, and would have proved generally charming to Phineas had it not been for a prying curiosity about his own personal affairs which he could not understand and which their recent acquaintanceship certainly did not warrant. He noticed also that she glanced frequently at his ring, and wondered

why it appeared to have such a fascination for her.

Directly opposite him was a girl who held that peculiar attraction for his eyes which comes when one is trying to decide whether a woman is beautiful or whether she is not. This indecision referred only to her face, as he had noticed her in the salon and had been struck by the exquisite grace of her figure and way of moving, which, though the simile may not be distinctly pleasing, reminded him of a trained woman, gymnast or classic dancer. She had such a form as an evening gown seems rather to denude than to disguise, and its flowing curves and long round arms gave an impression of supple resilience and perfectly coördinated elastic strength.

Her face was strikingly unusual, Phineas thought, and yet it had an elusive familiarity which puzzled him all through the dinner. Then as dessert was being served he placed it. When a child he had been given one Christmas a delightfully illustrated fairy book called *The Princess Niente*, and this girl's face was in feature and expression—or lack of it—precisely that of the sprite. There were the same long, narrow elfin eyes, set at

the slightest upward and outward slant and doubly fringed with black curving lashes; the little nose with its infantile concavity of bridge, and the wide mobile mouth, not quite straight, everted of lip and slightly curved upward at its outer corners.

It was a most singular face, not quite human, or rather not quite mortal, Phineas thought, and it seemed to contain a sort of eerie, mischievous intelligence. It seemed to him that such a fairy face might react in almost any way upon a man, to inspire either aversion or an imperative desire for possession. It was a trouble-making face, and he felt instinctively that this girl must be a trouble maker. Her whole type seemed one that could easily become an acquired taste. He was not surprised to learn from the marquise that she was the Miss Melton whom Mrs. Crosby had mentioned in her note.

"We crossed together," said Madame d'Irancy. "She is very fascinating. We became quite well acquainted. She is of French birth, though her father and mother were American artists."

When the men left the dining room Phineas caught sight of the marquise and Miss Mel-

ton in a corner of the salon and immediately joined them. Before they had been talking very long he began to notice that the girl's curious eyes, which were of a dark amber color, were frequently directed toward his emerald ring, and suspecting that for some reason Madame d'Irancy had mentioned it to her, he turned to the French lady and asked bluntly what there was about it that so interested her. To his surprise she parried the question.

"It is a very pretty ring," said she evasively, "and I should say it was of antique workmanship. A family heirloom perhaps?"

"Not of line," Phineas answered. "As a matter of fact I received it only this morning. It was a present from a friend to whom I had rendered a service." He did not miss the quick look that flashed between the two. "There seems to be some mystery about it. I wish you would tell me what."

"It is interesting to me, monsieur," said the marquise, "because it so precisely resembles a ring that was given to her fiancé when he went to the war by an intimate friend of mine."

Phineas tried to keep his face from show-

ing how much he was startled by this information. Glancing up his eyes met Miss Melton's, and something in their elfin light told him that so far as this girl was concerned he had not made much of a success of it.

"Indeed?" he answered. "What was the name of your friend's fiancé, madame?"

"Pierre de Marcy. He was an *aviateur* and was shot down in flames within the German lines about three months before the end of the war."

"Terrible!" murmured Phineas. "And, of course, the ring was never sent to his family?"

The marquise shook her head. "Such things scarcely ever happen," said she.

"May I ask the name of your friend who gave the ring?"

"Mademoiselle Odette Ménard." She shot a curious glance at Phineas' face. "Pardon, *capitaine!* I did not mean to disturb you. Of course the ring cannot be the one given by my poor friend to her unfortunate fiancé."

"Nevertheless," said Miss Melton, and her voice was precisely of the cool, limpid quality that Phineas would have expected, "it would be interesting, captain, to know where your friend purchased the ring."

"I shall have to ask," Phineas answered a little stiffly. "If it is possible to trace it back to France I shall, of course, return it to the marquise to send to Mademoiselle Ménard. It may be a little difficult, but I assure you that I shall do my best."

"*Merci, monsieur,*" murmured the marquise. "It would be very odd if a ring stolen by a boche on the battlefield should find its way here to America, would it not?"

She glanced at Phineas' troubled face and tactfully attempted to change the topic. But Miss Melton clung to it a little longer, as he had expected she would. Yes, his judgment had been correct—this girl was a meddler, a trouble seeker. The elfin mischief of her face did not belie her.

"Why do you thin it may be difficult to trace the ring, captain?" she asked in her liquid, honey-sweet voice.

"Because if it is really German loot disposed of here in America the people through whose hands it passed will naturally lie about it," Phineas answered, trying to conceal his irritation at her questioning his statement.

There was, of course, not the slightest doubt in his mind that the ring was the one

referred to by Madame d'Irancy. Apparently she did not know of the inscription, "*O. à P.*"—Odette to Pierre. The knowledge seemed to raise a curtain, to open long vistas of thought. But for the moment he did not wish to be interfered with by this meddling girl with her purling voice and sprite's face.

His words and possibly something in his tone brought a look fairly brimming with fairy malice, accentuated by an almost imperceptible lifting of the outer corner of one long dark eyebrow. It brought the blood into Phineas' face. For the first time in his life he was conscious of the swift, shameful impulse to maltreat a woman. He felt that he would like to sink his strong fingers into her bare snow-white shoulders and shake her until he dislodged that pyramid of fine black hair with the ruddy lights in it so snugly coifed on her small trim head. And he knew that this flash of brutality was less due to what she had said or because he was convinced that she thought him to be lying about the ring than to the very look of her, the lurking challenge in her amber eyes. She seemed to him less

a mortal woman than a materialized teasing elemental.

To his considerable relief another man joined them at this moment, and Phineas excused himself to exchange a few words with his hostess.

"What are you doing now, Phæbe?" she asked.

"Walking up and down like Satan, and hoping that he may find some work for my idle hands to do."

"He's too busy just now. Why don't you marry some rich girl?"

"Trot her up. Who is that Miss Melton anyhow? What is she?"

Mrs. Crosby laughed. "I was waiting for that. All the men get round to it. I think she's a fairy."

"So do I. Why has she come over here? War worker out of a job?"

"Anything but. She's a warrior worker hard on the job. Her smoke screen is French propaganda, which means incidentally that justly popular game called Knock the Boche."

"I see. She has just been trying to dig evidence of a new crime out of me."

"Then she'll get it if it's there. She's a beauty in her way, don't you think?"

"Yes," Phineas admitted, "in her way. She draws first prize—in a class of one. Like a Martian or Saturnite or stray denizen of Venus."

"Wait till you see her walk. She's got the most curious light, clinging tread and a sort of swing from the hip."

"I've seen it. I wanted to holler 'Scat!'"

"But she's not a bit feline."

"No. I imagine the cat's fur goes up when she's round. Well, good night, Proserpine. I've got to make a pilgrimage to South Brooklyn to see a friend with the flu. Thank you for thinking of a poor homeless 'bo. And don't believe any lies that Pixie-Nixie may tell you about me. I'm poor but honest—so far."

Chapter IV

PHINEAS had just finished dressing the next morning when the telephone rang and he was told that there was a lady below who wished to see him.

As the only lady he could think of who would so much as dream of calling at his hotel was Olga, he went downstairs feeling decidedly annoyed and determined to frost this incipient affair in its early burgeoning.

There was also the matter of the ring to bother him. He was told at the desk that his caller was in the ladies' parlor, and on entering that gloomy early-Victorian mausoleum he received the daily shock with which his new activities appeared to be in a way to furnish him. For there standing composedly by a corner window stood Miss Melton, very chic in sables and a Paris street dress.

It immediately flashed across Phineas' mind that the Marquise d'Irancy, convinced that his ring was the identical one given by Mademoiselle Ménard to her fiancé, had asked Miss Melton to see him and insist upon his

explaining the details of its purchase; and in this he was entirely correct.

Miss Melton offered him her hand in a self-possessed and friendly manner, and when he asked her to be seated took a chair with its back to the window, this bit of strategy, which obliged him to face the strong and searching glare, not being lost on Phineas.

"Captain Plunkett," said she, "I have come to ask a favor. Will you let me help you try to discover if your ring is indeed the one that was worn by Flight Lieutenant de Marcy when he was shot down inside the German lines?"

"That is quite unnecessary, Miss Melton," Phineas answered. "There can be no doubt whatever that it is." He slipped off the ring and handed it to her. "If you will look inside," said he, "you will see that it is engraved *O. à P.*, which stands of course for Odette to Pierre."

If he had expected to see any expression of surprise in her elfin face he was disappointed. She merely glanced at the inscription and handed him the ring with a slight nod.

"Madame d'Irancy was positive that it was

the same," said she, "but naturally did not like to insist upon it."

"So I imagined. I shall, of course, give her the ring to return to her friend with my compliments. But not immediately. I want to see if I can trace it."

"Will you let me help?"

Phineas shook his head.

"Why not?"

"Because in the first place the reason for which it was given me is a purely personal affair which I do not feel under any obligation to confide to anybody; and in the second, if you will excuse my frankness, I fail to see how the matter concerns you in any way at all."

Even this blunt statement failed to bring so much as a flicker of annoyance to her unusual face. On the contrary she nodded again, as though in admission of what he had said.

"I am not asking you this favor out of curiosity, captain. I am doing some publicity work and I should be very glad to have this additional proof of German ghouliness."

"It seems to me that you have it already. The ring has been positively identified as that

worn by Lieutenant de Marcy when he was shot down in flames, and I can testify that about six months later it was purchased here in New York."

"From whom?"

"That is what I shall try to find out. I do not wish to injure any innocent person who may have been in ignorance of where the ring first came from. The scoundrel who stripped it from De Marcy's charred finger may have sold it to some neutral who sold it to somebody else, and so by devious channels it found its way here. Unless I can manage to trace it approximately all the way back to the battlefield I may decide not to vouch for any more than that it was stolen there and eventually sold here."

Miss Melton appeared to reflect for a moment, then asked: "Has it not occurred to you, captain, that this may be a very significant case and indicate that possibly a great deal of German loot may be finding a secret market in this country?"

"It has. That is precisely my reason for wishing to make my investigations quietly and without any outside interference."

"Will you tell me one thing?"

Phineas shook his head. "I am very sorry, but it seems to me to be better at this moment not to tell anybody anything at all."

Again the almost imperceptible nod of her small head. Phineas was struck by the fact that instead of showing the least shade of resentment she appeared, if anything, to approve his stand. She looked at him thoughtfully, her trim head slightly aslant and her wide mouth whipped up at one corner in a smile. For the first time he found her curious face intensely pretty in an eerie and decidedly seductive way.

"I wonder if by any chance you are of the secret service," she said.

"No, I am not. That much I don't mind telling you. But I am beginning to think that you are."

"Why?"

"Because of your persistent curiosity. I hope you are. I dislike meddlers; perhaps because I am one myself."

"You are no meddler. Meddlers are invariably gossips, and you certainly aren't that. Of course you knew last night that the ring was the one Madame d'Irancy thought."

"Of course. And you knew that I knew,

and thought that I was lying because I did not want to give it back. *Merci, mam'selle.*"

She laughed outright. "Do you know, captain, I am positively beginning to like you."

"That's very nice of you. To return the compliment I may say that you have risen considerably in my esteem, now that I believe your butting-in to be for some authorized purpose."

"But I told you that I was a publicity agent, a *propagandiste*."

"Oh, buzz—that's only your disappearing paint. We are all fed up on the usual shop-worn term. Anybody with a grain of sense would know that there is no value in this stuff for propaganda purposes. Do you think that the most partisan pro-German believes it any part of boche method to leave valuable jewelry lying on its deceased owner, or to take it reverently from the cadaver and send it to his family with a tear-stained letter of condolence? That is vulgarly known in America as 'bull.'"

"You get better and better. And are, in fact, something of a surprise."

"But if they are making a regular business of smuggling it in to be surreptitiously sold

by unscrupulous dealers in this country," Phineas continued, ignoring her remark, "it is, as you say, something that needs looking into."

"Then why not let me help?"

"Because I have no authority to do so. I have not even the authority to investigate the business myself."

It seemed to him that her fairy face revealed the faintest note of satisfaction. The telltale left eyebrow raised the fraction of a millimeter, as it had the night before, but her teasing smile impressed him as purely artful. She threw back her head and her amber eyes glinted at him down the plane of her cheek. She rose. He, of course, rose also, and for a moment they stood very close together, each examining the other with freshened interest. They were of about the same height, which was medium for a man, above the average of Anglo-Saxon womankind. Phineas felt again that perverse impulse to lay hands on her, to seize her round shoulders and shake some information out of her, to break that tantalizing inscrutability.

"You are not at all the fool which some fools might take you for," said she. "Your

mimicry of surrounding idiots is perfect. But you would be far more efficient out of uniform—dressed as you were before your father lost his fortune.”

“I see that you have looked up my *dossier*. Well, I get demobilized next week.”

“And then what?”

“I don’t know.”

“Please pardon me for saying that I don’t believe you. Wait! I take that back. You may not know—but you have got a pretty good idea.”

“You are a fairy after all, aren’t you?”

Phineas threw a little sarcasm into his tone, and then to his intense surprise he saw that his taunting words had got a positive reaction. She had turned a little to the light on rising, and to Phineas’ astonishment her face now underwent an instant and extraordinary change. An observer who had not heard his remark would have thought he had said something shocking, made a remark that was indelicate and insulting to her pride and modesty. She had one of those very white, alabaster skins, and the scarlet wave that now swept up to the edges of her hair, which grew rather low, was more than startling. It was alarm-

ing, a congestion. Phineas would not have believed that a mere blush could become such a sanguinary deluge. It changed her expression; made her delicate features look heavy for an instant, and her amber eyes lighter. They gleamed at him in a dangerous way.

Then it was gone as quickly as it had come and she surveyed the disturbed young man with that peculiar smile which was like a penman's flourish in red ink across her face.

"I beg your pardon," said he. "I didn't mean to say anything offensive."

"Of course not. You had no reason to suppose it would upset me to be called a fairy. But it always does."

"Why? Do you believe in fairies?"

"Sometimes. They used to say that my mother's mother had fairy blood. She was Irish. I've inherited some of her peculiarities."

"Of what sort?"

"Well—unusual physical strength for one thing. Good-by."

She offered him her hand, and as Phineas took it unsuspectingly he found his own suddenly crushed as though caught in a set of cogs. His knuckles were ground together,

his seal ring and the emerald one jammed painfully into the adjacent fingers. The ferocious grip nearly wrung a yelp of pain from him. The next instant she had loosed his crumpled hand and was moving toward the door, and as he stared after her, astonished, he noticed the peculiar clinging step to which Mrs. Crosby had referred. She looked back over her shoulder and he caught the flicker of her mocking malicious smile.

Chapter V

PHINEAS spent the day much as he had the two previous ones except that he confined his applications for employment to strangers. He was by no means sure that he would care to accept Karakoff's proposition, whatever this might be. His evening at the Crosbys' had made him a little homesick for his own kind, from which he felt barred only by circumstance, and he had a vague presentiment that if he were to become involved with this alien commercial clique it would result in a sort of social emigration.

But though his uniform and officer's insignia together with his well-bred manner and presence insured him polite consideration wherever he applied, his utter lack of business knowledge and experience together with his candor in admitting it made all his efforts unavailing. The chances are that he gave rather the impression of a young man conscientiously looking for a job and praying that he might not find it—a situation which unfortunately promised to be that of many a demobilized warrior in the near future. A young man who has spent

some months in the trenches with frequent sallies over the top or fighting a tank or engaging in air combats must find little to attract him in the high stool and ledger. He who has towed field guns to the Front behind a motor tractor is not apt to find relish in the dragging of a plow.

The tedium of this profitless day put Phineas in a more receptive frame of mind for what Karakoff might have to offer, and he turned his steps toward the dealer's apartment with an agreeable premonition of adventure. On entering he heard the hum of animated conversation and a big harsh booming voice which, while aggressive, was not unpleasant.

The other guests, seven in all, had already arrived and Karakoff presented him to each in turn. They were well-groomed men of cultivated manner and alert intelligent faces, some of them Jewish merchants of an estimable type, such as have inherited a large and prosperous trade to which they add through each succeeding generation; keen bargainers, but liberal in their relations and patriotic supporters of national movements. They repre-

sented principally the leading art jewelers of the city.

The man to claim Phineas' immediate interest was an apparent outsider—the Baron Isidor de Rosenthal, of Paris—and formerly, Budapest. In fact, when this dynamic personality was among those present it was difficult to be much occupied in any other objective. The Baron was as easy to ignore as a brass band in one's bedroom. He was a colossus, and as Phineas first sighted him he stood like that of Rhodes, thick legs apart, huge face resembling that of a swollen Mephistopheles. Either of his busy eyebrows might have furnished the mustache for a Napoleonic brigadier, and the pair of them had a vertical rise and fall of at least two inches when the baron was in animated conversation.

At such moments his voice resembled the G note of an organ with the pipe cracked.

Though promptly on the hour Phineas was the last to arrive, and it struck him that the party might have convened a little early for a special reason, which was not entirely to discuss a *buffet russe* about which it was gathered and the sight of which would have driven the Food Controller into epileptiform

convulsions. Of this he was asked to partake, after which they seated themselves for the more serious business of a banquet of Lucullus. Phineas thought that he had never seen so much food nor any so deliciously prepared, but he noticed that most of the guests were *gourmets* rather than *gourmands*, eating rather lightly and sparing the vintage wines, of which few took more than a single glass.

To his considerable surprise he found himself the guest of honor, at Karakoff's right, with a lean grizzled man whom he had often seen at Sherry's and Delmonico's next him on the other side. The conversation was general and interesting, passing from one to another subject of topical interest with a fair amount of national politics, which embraced an argument that the next President should be neither learned professor nor diplomat nor soldier nor even financier, but an experienced business man whose talents should achieve as nearly as possible the solid reconstruction of trade.

Then suddenly, over the coffee and liqueurs, which were served at the table, there fell as if by previous arrangement the hush that precedes a speech. But there was no speech.

Speaking in a purely conversational tone

Karakoff said in his pleasantly modulated voice: "Since we have all decided that Captain Plunkett is the gentleman whose services we should like to engage for trying to carry out our idea I think it is time to see what he has to say about it."

He paused for a moment, and as Phineas glanced round the table he found in the shrewd faces of the guests a certain friendly, one might almost say benevolent, regard. Karakoff turned to him in the same pleasant easy way of one discussing some topic of casual interest.

"You see, captain," said he, "the matter of which we were talking the other night is one that interests all of us here a great deal. As importing merchants of jewels and *bibelots* and *objets de vertu* who are carrying on a legitimate trade and paying our due revenue duties we are not much pleased with the idea of having our market diluted with smuggled stuff. We are now beginning to think that this underground commerce is being carried on under the direction of some organized system. But we are not sure. We want proof. We have reason to suspect that a vast amount of valuable jewelry saved from the wreck

of their fortunes by Russian nobles and rich commoners is being bought up by some secret agency to be smuggled into this country through various channels and sold to unscrupulous dealers from a number of small *dépôts* like the one in South Brooklyn which my daughter was indiscreet enough to visit and from which you so chivalrously rescued her at great risk to yourself."

"Good for you!" burbled Rosenthal. "Such a disgrace it would haf been."

Karakoff looked at Phineas expectantly. The others also appeared to be waiting for him to speak, so he asked: "Have you anything definite on which you base this supposition?"

"Practically nothing. We have learned, however, of several such *dépôts* being established in some of the larger cities, selling out their contraband and then disappearing. We know also that some very valuable gems have been finding their way into the hands of small and suspectedly shady dealers. We have kept quiet about it, wishing to bide our time and lull this organization, if it is indeed such into more daring operations. What we want to find out now is whether this illicit

trade is being conducted by independent speculators or under the control of a well organized and capitalized system. If the former there is really not much that we can hope to do about it. But if we can get proof of the latter with some knowledge of its working methods we shall then turn over the task of correcting it to the Federal secret service of this country."

"Does the secret service suspect anything of the sort at this moment?" Phineas asked.

"Not to our knowledge, though it must know that there is a good deal of jewels and other smuggling going on. It is, of course, handicapped by the great increase in all sorts of shipping and the vast number of unidentified individuals employed. We wish to render a service not only to ourselves but to the Government. We have already sent two trusty men to Russia for the purpose of investigating that end, and we want two more over here. You are the first of these to be selected."

"You see, Captain Plunkett," said a gray-bearded man across the table, "we know all about you and your family and social connections and the very clever bit of work

which unfortunately and through no fault of yours got you into trouble with the paper you represented. You are well known as a young gentleman of the fashionable set and are thoroughly familiar with the city and its environs. Permit me to say, also, that we feel implicit confidence in your courage and abilities."

Phineas flushed and bowed. Karakoff nodded as though to indorse what had been said, and continued: "I need not tell you, captain, that there may be a considerable amount of danger attached to the job. If we are really up against a well-organized system and it discovers what you are about it may try to get you. You will have to watch your step. This factor shall be considered in your emolument."

He paused, and all eyes were turned toward Phineas. His temporary embarrassment had passed and he was turning the situation quickly in his mind. The proposition appealed intensely to his present mood and latent love of adventure, but he did not think that these men had yet got the big idea.

"All of this is very interesting, gentlemen," said he slowly, "but, if you will pardon me

for saying so, I doubt if you fully realize just what we are up against. I have reason to believe that there is more in this business than Mr. Karakoff has so clearly expressed."

The battery of shrewd eyes round the table seemed to fire a salvo of surprise. This was scarcely the answer that any had expected. They had on the contrary looked for a certain lack of conviction, even skepticism, on the part of this young man, who to them represented the beau ideal of New York's *jeunesse dorée*, the erstwhile pampered idler of whom the class represented the best part of their clientele. Experience had taught them, however, that youths of Phineas' type were not all fools by any reckoning, that sometimes they were throwbacks to the old hard-shelled, hard-bitted founders of the family fortune, at whose feet any one of them might have profited to sit and learn his lesson of business daring and business ruthlessness. They could look through Phineas' handsome, amiable and rather empty face and see the gear enmeshed behind it.

"Perhaps I had better explain," he began modestly.

"Shoot!" gurgled Rosenthal.

"Well then, has it ever occurred to you

gentlemen that this new flux of jewels and other stuff which you say is flowing into the country may be not merely the result of liquidation on the part of impoverished Russians whose property has been grabbed by the Bolshewiki and other robbers, but a very much bigger scheme, possibly of German organization, for realizing on their enormous quantity of war booty from all the regions invaded by their troops?"

There was a moment of astonished silence; then Rosenthal erupted a roaring "Py Chingo, ve nefer t'ink of dat! Ah, dese American poys—how I lofe dem!"

Karakoff's dark eyes were fixed intently upon Phineas. Had any of the others been looking at him he might have been struck by some peculiar quality in their gaze—a sort of flat feral glare, such as one might catch in the eyes of a caged panther when a dog strays into the big carnivore's house.

It lasted for only a second; then he said in his easy pleasant voice: "Upon my word, captain, that is something of an idea! What suggested it to your mind, may I ask?"

"This ring." Phineas slipped it from his finger and handed it to his host. "Miss Kara-

koff bought it the other night at that place in South Brooklyn and very kindly sent it to me as an appreciation of the little service which I was able to render her. I wore it last night at a dinner given at her house by Mrs. Emory Crosby, and in the course of the evening it was recognized by the Marquise d'Irancy as a *gage d'amour* given by her friend, a Mademoiselle Odette Ménard, to her fiancé, the Lieutenant Pierre de Marcy, of the French Army Aviation Corps. He was shot down in flames within the German lines about three months before the end of the war. There can be no doubt of its identity because, as you can see, it is engraved on the inside 'O. à P.'—Odette to Pierre."

"Sapristi!" Rosenthal burst out, his bulging eyes with their curious brown speckled mottling fastened on Phineas. "What a business! I know her well, the sweet little Marquise d'Irancy. I should say I did. Her father is an old friend and once rendered me a tr-remendous service. You may remember, my fr-riends"—he glared round the table—"I gafe her that great diamond, the Sultana, for her corbeil. It was most beautifully mounted by Kalik, of the Place Vendôme."

There was a murmur of assent. Mention of the Sultana to this gathering was like mentioning a Derby winner of several years ago in racing circles or the swift schooner Atlantic, holder of the transatlantic sailing record, to a group of yachtsmen. Curious scrutiny rested on the big baron. They were wondering from what particular form of penal servitude the old filibuster might have been saved by his friend to have made him give a blue diamond worth almost any figure as a wedding present to the daughter. Phineas brought them back to the business in hand.

"The question is," said he: "How did this ring find its way to that raided dump in South Brooklyn?"

"You are dead r-right, my poy," growled Rosenthal. "How?"

Phineas turned to Karakoff. "Of course I shall have to return the ring."

"Of course. You must tell my daughter about it. She is coming in to sing for us a little later. Olga will be very pleased to know that this poor young lady is to receive at least one small souvenir of her fiancé, fallen on the field of honor. Aside from the sentimental, such tokens have a psychometric value to

the bereaved. But you are right in saying that we did not realize fully the forces with which we have to cope. The circumstance is most significant—and I am inclined to think, captain, that it is going to make your work far more difficult and dangerous than we had anticipated—that is, if you choose to undertake it.”

“I have already done so,” Phineas answered.

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Chapter VI

THE new facet of the affair presented by Phineas Plunkett's revelation was discussed by Karakoff's guests at some length, and he could see that he had risen considerably in the esteem of the gathering. Then as practical business men with Karakoff as spokesman their official proposition was definitely offered. Phineas was to receive five hundred dollars a month with *carte blanche* for his expenses during the period of a year at least. Should he be successful in collecting information that might lead to the discovery and destruction of an organized system of jewel smuggling he was to receive a premium of fifty thousand dollars.

Rosenthal attacked this arrangement with yells of protest. He called them pikers, swore that the job was not half paid. He was politely informed by an elderly man of rabbinic countenance that in the first place they were not all multi-millionaires like himself, and that in the second they could not in the nature of the business cherish any great hope for the success of Phineas' investigations. They con-

sidered the undertaking to be one of extreme difficulty. If he succeeded he would touch a very tidy sum. If he failed he would at least be decently recompensed for his efforts, and they would be the losers. This was precisely the angle from which Phineas himself viewed the proposition, and he said as much.

Presently they adjourned to the salon, when Karakoff excused himself and went to fetch his daughter. He was some time absent and while waiting Rosenthal drew Phineas aside.

"You haf a tough yob, my poy," said he. "I am an old scout who has tumbled down republics and put presidents upon t'eir t'rones. If you need help come and see me. I will be at der Biltmore all vinter. Come anyhow. I like you."

Phineas thanked the good old Czech and promised to call as soon as he returned to town after being demobilized. Karakoff returned presently, escorting Olga, very lovely and demure in a simple Empire gown of white tulle with panniers and dewdrops, her hair done in a way which made her look like a big little girl. She understood her audience, did Olga, Phineas thought. For him, two nights before, she had been the brilliant, scintillating

femme du monde, and now for this sophisticated elderly gathering she was ingénue.

She greeted each of her father's guests, none of whom to Phineas' surprise she appeared to have met previously. He had been under the impression that most of them were intimate friends. When it came his own turn she lingered a moment.

"Papa has told me about the ring," she murmured, "and, of course, you must return it. That's what I get for going to a place which I knew to be off color. If the marquise says anything about reimbursement tell her it's not to be thought of. I'm going to give you something else."

"You are not!" Phineas contradicted. "I shall not accept it. You see, it's not as though I had saved you from drowning or carried you out of a burning house or something of the sort. What I did was opposed to all military ethics, and I want to forget about it and assume that we had met in a nicer way."

She did not appear to take offense at this straight speech; in fact, she looked rather pleased.


"You are right. I hadn't thought of it in that way! Will you come to see me to-mor-

row? There is something I want to tell you about."

"My leave expires to-morrow night. I've got to report for demobilization. I'll call when I come back to town next week."

Olga nodded and went to the piano, at which Karakoff had already seated himself. She sang some short Russian folk songs, and Phineas was not surprised to find that she had a really excellent mezzo-contralto voice that showed finished training. Her father, too, was evidently a musician of more than amateur ability and rendered a few brief and difficult selections in masterly style.

Then feeling that his prospective employers might be glad of the opportunity to discuss him a little Phineas said good night and went out, to find it snowing hard and with a strong wind sweeping up from the bay. He started across Madison Square, breasting the storm, head down, the driving snow swirling in his face, but eyes protected by the visor of his cap. Halfway, he nearly collided with a big bulk which loomed suddenly against him, but catching a glimpse of its lower segment he swung sharply to one side. As he did so something whirred past his ear. There was



a resounding thump, a startled grunt, a curse, and for a moment or two a violent scuffle.

Phineas halted and glanced round, to see a huge policeman grappling with a writhing figure which appeared to have collided with him. But before the astonished officer could clutch the man this latter spun about, ducked under the powerful arm, and the next instant had scurried off across the grass plot and disappeared in the murk. The policeman did not pursue but stood looking after him and cursing in a strong Hibernian accent.

"What the deuce——" Phineas began.

"Y'have had a close shave, sor," growled the officer, peering at him curiously. "The guy was follyin' ye and let drive wit' a slung shot just as ye side-stepped. 'Twas on me chist he landed, dom 'im."

"Hurt you?"

"Divvle a bit, sor. Sure I was that surprised I could not grip the felly. 'Twas like tryin' to grip a cat, and him squirmen'. This town is fillin' up wit' thim Bullsheviki. A mon must mind his step."

Phineas thanked the policeman for his timely if inadvertent rescue, and went on his way in a very thoughtful frame of mind. It

was the first time that he had ever been attacked and it struck him as more than odd that a thug should have picked out a young officer for his prey. For one thing such a victim would not be apt to have much money about him, and for another he might easily prove a dangerous person to tackle, being strong and active and in first-class training.

Was it possible, he wondered, that the motive of the gathering at Karakoff's apartment had leaked out, to reach the ears of the organization they were planning to uncover, and that the rendezvous had been under espionage? In this case it might be assumed that he was an officer of the Army Intelligence who had been detailed to investigate the business, though such a job would be properly not of the Army but of the Federal Secret Service. Still it was possible, and Phineas began to realize that his work might be destined to hold a considerable element of danger.

At an early hour the next morning Phineas telephoned Madame d'Irancy, who was stopping with her husband at the Ritz, and made an appointment to call upon her there at ten o'clock as he was leaving for camp on a mid-

day train. The marquise received him cordially and said a number of complimentary things anent his flat refusal to accept any reimbursement for the purchase of the ring. He told her no more than he had Miss Melton, and assured her that the matter should be carefully investigated, then changed the topic and mentioned having met the Baron de Rosenthal. Her face lighted up for a moment, then clouded:

"The baron is very widely known and respected," said she. "His title was conferred by the Pope in recognition of his having saved a community of Bulgarian Christians from massacre in the Balkan War. Fancy a Jew receiving a title from the Vatican! But Monsieur de Rosenthal is *sui generis*. He knows everybody and enjoys the confidence of statesmen the world over. He is received by royalty. Did he tell you of his having given me the wonderful Sultana for my corbeil?" Her face assumed so tragic an expression that Phineas half guessed at some calamity in connection with this princely gift, and at his affirmative answer she asked: "Will you keep a secret, captain? I would not have the baron know for worlds."

Phineas promised.

"Well, I have lost it. That is to say, it was taken from me. When the war burst upon us I was at our château near St.-Mihiel. My mother-in-law was with us and had just undergone a serious operation and could not be moved. My husband was with his regiment in the Champagne. Well, the Germans occupied our château, where we remained throughout the war, and conducted themselves none too badly on the whole. They respected our privacy in that part of the house which we occupied until the very last, when you Americans made your wonderfully swift advance with also some of our own brave poilus.

"Then as we were expecting to be freed at any moment a German *Rittmeister* who was billeted with us burst into my room one night. He made an absurd apology, then said: 'Madame, I have learned that you have in your possession a celebrated diamond known as the Sultana. Denial is useless. We are now forced to evacuate this place within an hour or two. You must give me this gem immediately. If you do so I shall withdraw my troops without molestation. If you refuse

I shall respect neither your property nor your person.'

"What was I to do, monsieur? Since the occupation of our château by the enemy I had worn the Sultana day and night. It became immediately evident that he meant to carry out his threat. To save us all I gave him the diamond. He appeared to be a little ashamed, and muttered something about its being not for himself but for the Fatherland. Up to this time he had been very decent for a boche. Then he saluted and went out, and just before daylight they left the premises without doing any damage, as he had agreed. But they waited too long, for your wonderful Yankees were after them like hounds and about a kilometer from the château the boches were surrounded and killed. The *Rittmeister* who had my beautiful diamond was riddled with bullets. The Yankees did not stop but continued the pursuit. And that is probably the last that I shall ever see of the Sultana."

"Who searched the body?" Phineas asked.

"Some *brancardiers* who came up later, but a number of people from the town had already visited the place. We have made investigations, but with no result. We accuse nobody.

For all we can tell he may have hid the diamond when he saw that capture was inevitable."

"I think that you are making a mistake not to tell the baron, madame," Phineas said.

"It would break his heart. What can he do? What can anybody do? If the Sultana was stolen it will have been recut by this time."

Phineas admitted the truth of this and expressed his sympathy for her loss. Shortly afterward he left, and as he turned his steps toward the railroad station he said thoughtfully to himself: "This thing of being a jewel hound opens up new fields of possibility with every passing day."

Chapter VII

A FEW days later Phineas, now a well-dressed civilian, got out of the train at the Grand Central Depot, having just come from the sanitarium in Westchester where his father was a patient.

In trying to study out some rational *modus operandi* for his campaign he had considered a variety of plans. But none of these was very satisfactory, and remembering Rosenthal's proffer of assistance he decided to call upon the baron and ask for criticism and advice. Not only had he been profoundly impressed by the unusual personality of the big Jew but what he had learned from Madame d'Irancy of the esteem in which he was so cosmopolitanly held gave him a confidence such as he did not feel for any of the others, Karakoff included.

It was five of the afternoon and the baron was in and desired him to be shown up immediately. On entering Phineas was welcomed with a roar, seized by the hand, clapped on the shoulder, then hurled into a chair and exhorted to join in a frontal attack upon the

tiffin, which had just been served. The table drawn over to the window looked like the free-lunch counter of a fashionable bar in the good old days when such institutions existed. There was a samovar of tea which filled the room with a scent of roses, tea from the baron's own plantation and lugged about in air-tight tins.

Phineas thought he had never really known what tea was before.

His host now proceeded to hurl food at him with yells, and his manservant, a raven-like person who clutched dishes in his talons, aided and abetted his master in this forced feeding. Phineas, who had a soldier's appetite, did not too violently resist. Then, stuffed to the muzzle with caviar and roll mops and pickled okra and kale and mayonnaise and deviled eggs and cassava wafers and a few other articles of unrestricted diet in a solution of weak but fragrant tea with no milk or sugar, Phineas leaned back panting while his host with a gurgle of repletion blew the raven out of the room and reached for a box which contained some black spinnaker-boom cigars.

"Vell—vell," said he, "so you are *démobilisé*, my poy." It is impossible to reproduce

his diction, which was of a thick and guttural polyglot sort and did not suggest particularly any other tongue. "And now you are ready to go to vor-rk?"

"Ready so far as the will is concerned, baron. But I'm hanged if I can say so much about the way."

"Py chingo, I belief you! It is a funny business. Nefer mind. Efery business is funny to-day. We are living in a maelstrom—a *tourbillon*. The vor-rld is a stew pot and because they haf stopped shooting off cannon except for salutes they say we are at peace. We are so much at peace as the bowels of Vesuvius. The whole vor-rld is full of duds. Any day somet'ing terrible may happen."

Phineas agreed, and told of the attack made upon him in Madison Square. The big Czech looked ferociously grave.

"You must look out," said he. "You must go sidevays like a crab, ready to shoot in one direction or the other, and wit' all your feelers out. Now, my poy, a vor-rd of advice: Do not tell anybody anyt'ing, not even Karakoff. No doubt he is all right. I do not know much about him except that he is a Russian noble exiled many years ago ven he was in

the army. He bought Petrovski's business not long ago.

"The others are good people—old established merchants. What is your plan? You haf not'ing to fear from old Isidor Rosenthal."

"I know that, baron."

"How do you know?"

"The Marquise d'Irancy told me what a great man you are."

Rosenthal's eyebrows went up an inch or two and his great laugh boomed out. "The sweet little marquise!" he braved. "Sapristi, the poor child! Did she tell you about the r-rape of the Sultana? She t'inks I do not know. Let her. Perhaps you may find it some day. What is your plan?"

"It's not much good baron, but it's all I can think of right off the bat. I thought I'd first try to get a billet as second or third officer on some ship running back and forth across."

"Can you qualify?"

"I think so. I was skipper of my little schooner yacht and have a master's papers."

"Good! I did not know you were a sailorman. And then?"

"Then when I'd got my billet I might locate one of these shady dealers they mentioned the other night and go to him and say: 'Look here, boss, I'm hep to this jewel-smuggling stuff that's going on, and I want some of it. One of my pals in another ship put me wise. I'm just the bird you guys need. I speak French and German and a little Dutch, and you can bank on me to get away with it.' If he turned me down I'd try somewhere else."

"And if he took you on?"

"That would be a start, and I might turn up something. It would take time, several trips probably, but I'd have signed on for a year. They've got to trust somebody, and a bankrupt gentleman that goes in for graft is pretty good stuff for such a game. I'd make no secret about who I was."

"Good!" Rosenthal let out a roar. "It is so good a plan as any other. Try it; and come and tell me how it vor'rks. But do not tell anybody else."

The telephone rang. Rosenthal picked up the instrument, listened, yelled into it and set it down with a sort of whoop.

"A lady reporter who vants to interview

me. Do not go. She is very nice. I promised her some stuff about the Bolsheviki."

A moment later the buzzer sounded and the door of the antechamber was opened by the raven

"Show the lady in," bawled Rosenthal.

To Phineas' astonishment Miss Melton entered.

At sight of him the wide crooked smile whipped up the corner of her mouth and there was that characteristic lifting of the left eyebrow which he had previously observed.

The two men rose and Rosenthal took the small hand which had so astonished Phineas. His great bulk eclipsed her, as if she had stepped behind a safe; and deep rumbles came out of him.

"Ha, little von," said he, "you look very nice. Permit me to present my young friend, Mr. Plunkett."

"We've already met, baron." She gave Phineas a friendly nod. "I'm afraid I'm interrupting——"

"I vish you would interrupt me every day. So you vant to know about the Bolsheviki movement in America? You haf come to the r-right shop. There is one!" He made a

stabbing gesture toward Phineas. "He gave up his chob to serve his country, and now the Government has gifen him the sack. He would like to get even—make moonshine or smoogle diamonds or somet'ing. You cannot blame him."

Phineas listened in astonishment to this vociferous string of inventions. But he knew that Rosenthal was not the man for idle utterance, and held his peace. Miss Melton's amber eyes flashed him a yellow gleam and she gave her elfin smile.

"You can't be sure of anybody these days, can you, baron? But joking aside——"

"But I am not joking, my dear," roared Rosenthal. "One does not joke about Bolshéviki—any more as one jokes about Spanish influenza made in Chermany. This country has them both, and bad. Our fr-riend the captain is in great danger. He has just shed his heavy uniform and his pores are all open for anarchy."

"Is that really true, Captain Plunkett?"

"I'm afraid the baron has said it." Phineas had taken his cue. He guessed that Rosenthal must have some sound reason for wishing to deceive this girl. "I feel that I've had a

pretty raw deal. So do thousands of others in my position. Why couldn't the Government have taken a leaf from England's book and demobilized us only as fast as it could find us jobs? Now we've got to make our own—and they may not always be to our dear uncle's liking."

"Sapristi! You see?" roared Rosenthal. "Here's a Bolshevik in the making—in the aldehyde stage. And there will soon be t'ousands, by chingo! What you expect? To gif up a chob to fight for a country and then when you are no longer needed to haf it kick up by the pants? There vill be tr-rouble. There vill be many men desiring new things, like Chuils Cæsar said. But come, I vaste your time. What vould you like to know?" He turned to Phineas: "Excuse me for a little minute, captain. Do not go."

He ushered the girl into a sort of study en suite, for the old fellow's apartment was a regal one, and for about a quarter of an hour there came from behind the closed doors a sort of drone, as from many busy hives, occasionally punctuated by a yell, probably when some reflection roused the baron's ire. Then the humming ceased and a moment later

Phineas heard the front door open, a few rumbling words, and it shut again. Rosenthal entered from the antechamber, rubbing his great paws together, and his eyebrows working up and down.

"Sapristi! A clefer gir-rl. I tried to fill her full of prunes about you, but I am not sure."

"What was the idea, baron?"

"Zut—to fool her, of course. I haf a notion that she is of the French secret police, and if so she may be vor-rking with the American. In such a case it is better that she should t'ink you a malcontent."

"But why?"

"Oh, come, my poy, it is clear as mud. There are so many leaks. If the police suspect you your vor-rk will be much safer. It vill get to the organization you are after, and the vor-rd will be passed that you are von of t'em."

"I see. I'd never thought of the police in just that way."

"Listen. You are now to t'ink of yourself as von of this gang. Do not forget. You must not get arrested if you can help, but you must be under suspicion. That is the only

way to go about it. But I am not sure that we haf fooled this girl. She is perhaps more clefer than we. She has somet'ing—a sense—a *flair*. Well, we shall see what we shall see."

Chapter VIII

ON LEAVING Rosenthal, Phineas went to Karakoff's to report his return to town and that he was ready to get to work. He did not go to the apartment but to the shop, where he found the proprietor, who received him with his characteristic politeness, neither formal nor effusive.

Rosenthal's information that Karakoff was actually a Russian nobleman, exiled some twenty or thirty years previously, gave Phineas a different feeling about him. It explained the naturalness of his easy gracious manner, his uncommon good looks, and a certain air which one felt to be inborn and not assumed. He had probably been as a young man an amateur of *objets d'art*, connoisseur of antiques, especially in regard to ancient jewelry and small bibelots, and on being exiled to America he had turned this knowledge to practical use.

Karakoff now took Phineas into his private office and handed him a check for his first month's services.

"Keep a general account of your expenses,"

said he. "It does not need to be itemized unless the item is a considerable one, running, let us say, over a hundred dollars. We are none of us disposed to regard the cost if only it promises to lead to results. If at any time you are pressed for money you have only to send me a wire. Have you thought of any method of procedure?"

"I've outlined a general scheme," Phineas answered, "but it is one which ought to pay its own operation. I'll tell you about it a little later when I see how it promises to work."

"All right. Go about the business in your own way and let me hear from you now and then. Steer clear of the official authorities. We want to manage this thing on our own until the time comes. There are too many franc-tireur detectives nowadays. It is the fault of the Government for inviting everybody to get in the game and it has messed up many a delicate job. Good luck, and take care of yourself."

Phineas returned to his former hotel and going to his room spent about an hour in concentrated thought. The result of this was the decision to make a thorough canvass of

the city's curio and antique shops, especially those dealing in semiprecious articles, with the idea of forming some conjecture as to the source of their supply.

To many people antiques are merely antiques and the costly rubbishry displayed by one dealer looks like that of the next, but to the eye of the connoisseur the different wares have an especial significance. Phineas in the days of his prosperity while studying for the Beaux Arts in Paris and motoring extensively about Central Europe had become something of an authority in *objects de vertu*. He had learned not only to tell the true from the false but to recognize the *fabrique*, its epoch and geographical origin. He knew cameos and enamels and miniatures and snuff-boxes and *horlogerie*—clocks, watches—and had also some general knowledge of antique art jewelry and work in precious metals.

Realizing however that it would not do to enter a shop in the guise of a rich young man with a fad for collecting and then return later as deck officer in the merchant marine with a smuggling proposition he confined his research to an inspection of show windows. For the first few days this proved very discouraging

and did not promise to get him anywhere at all. Then on a side street in the forties over near the North River he came upon something more interesting. This was a shop sandwiched in between rooming houses, and over the show window was a large but dingy sign:

DURAND BROTHERS
IMPORTERS OF ANTIQUES

The building was slightly higher than those on either side, the top story being apparently a loft. The exhibit in the window was principally of clocks, and Phineas observed immediately that they were all French clocks of unquestionable value; ormolu and buhl and vernis Martin and onyx and the like; such clocks as furnish part of the *garniture de cheminée* in French châteaux and rich bourgeois houses; family heirlooms, and as essential a part of the house furniture as the kitchen sink. The watches also were mostly of French manufacture, though with a fair sprinkling of Swiss.

It seemed to Phineas that the place was less of a retail establishment than a distributing agency for small dealers. He thought

immediately of the well-known predilection of the looting German soldier for clocks, a singular mania which had been one of the war's grim jokes. Cartoon and caricatures in Parisian comic papers like *Le Rire* and *Le Sourire* and *Pêle-Mêle* and *Culotte Rouge* invariably depicted the plundering boche with a clock or two pendant from some part of his bulky person. It struck Phineas that here might be something worth investigating.

The family clock was about the first thing that the enemy would grab and the last that the unfortunate victims would sell.

The next idea to occur to Phineas was that since it would probably take him some time to find a seagoing billet he might as well room in one of the houses next door, where he could keep the place more or less under observation. They were precisely the sort of quarters to be occupied by a young ship's officer out of a billet and low in funds. He decided to return to his hotel, shift into one of his old sea-stained blue yachting suits and make the change. It was then about four o'clock, and on entering the office he heard himself being paged. There was a lady waiting to

see him, and on entering the parlor he was not greatly surprised to find Miss Melton.

But it was an entirely different Miss Melton. Phineas experienced a shock similar to one he had received some years before at the Bal des Quatre Arts when the girl with whom he was dancing and whom he thought to be some pretty model or demi-mondaine had accidentally slipped her mask, discovering herself to his astonished eyes as a young American wife of his acquaintance, prominent in fashionable society of New York and Paris, and whose reputation would have been scrapped in about two seconds if it were known that she had assisted at that saturnalia without her husband.

For Miss Melton was transfigured.

All the insouciance of her fairy face had disappeared.

It was eager and intense, and her tawny eyes, opened to an astonishing width, blazed at Phineas with a sort of feral avidity. She seized him by the wrist.

"I need you right away! There's not a moment to lose! I know all about you. We're working on the same job. Get a heavy overcoat and cap, and a pistol and pocket

torch if you've got them, and come with me."

"Where."

"I'll tell you on the way—or when the time comes. I want you to run a motor boat. For heaven's sake, don't stand there with your mouth open! Hurry! We haven't a second to spare. You are not afraid of me, are you?"

"Not yet. All right; just a second."

Phineas dashed up to his room, slipped into a heavy ulster, and grabbing a golf cap, his pocket torch and automatic sped back to the ladies' parlor. In the same breathless way Miss Melton rushed him out of the hotel and into a long high-powered motor car drawn up at the curb. She leaned forward and said to the chauffeur:

"Now go to Babylon, Long Island; and drive as fast as you can without getting us arrested."

The man nodded and they moved quickly away, arriving at the ferry just in time to catch a boat. Crossing the ferry their chauffeur got down to smoke a cigarette. Phineas looked curiously at his abductress. She was enveloped in a thick burberry, which gave her a bulky appearance, and wore a round seal-

skin cap which might have been a man's and could be turned down to cover all but the face. In the bottom of the car was a small valise.

"Now suppose you tell me what this is all about," said Phineas.

"We are going out to meet an incoming ship."

"Where?"

"At the Fire Island Light vessel. That's ten miles off shore. There is a motor boat waiting for us at Babylon."

Phineas reflected for an instant. "If it's a boat of any size and ordinary draft we will not be able to get across to Fire Island Inlet unless the tide happens to be high."

"It does happen to be high."

"How do you know?"

"They told me so in the office of the Line. Do you know how to run every sort of a marine motor?" She looked at him with an anxious gleam in her amber eyes.

"I understand all the ordinary types."

"This must be an ordinary type, as the boat is a big open one used for taking parties out in the season."

"Then I can manage it, I guess. In that case it is probably very light draft, as all those Great South Bay boats have to be to get about. How did you know that I was a seagoing chauffeur?"

"Mrs. Crosby told me. She said that you had been a keen yachtsman and understood all sorts of boats. Do you think you can find the inlet in the dark?"

"Yes, if it's clear. We get the back shine of the light and the snow should give us bright landmarks. Besides, it won't be very dark. There'll be a half moon behind that muck. But this southeasterly wind is pretty sure to bring in the fog if it freshens. Even if it does we can manage it if the boat's got a chart and a compass."

Miss Melton looked rather worried. "I ordered everything put aboard that we would be apt to need," said she. "If it has not been done we shall simply have to make the best of it. There is no time to hunt up anything. As it is we may be too late. The ship I want to intercept passed Nantucket at eight o'clock this morning."

"What's her speed?"

"They told me at the office that she might be counted on doing about sixteen knots."

Phineas had sailed so often up and down the coast on the little schooner he formerly owned that distances and courses were fixed in his head with fair accuracy. He proceeded to make some computations aloud. "Two hundred knots from Nantucket, less forty; one hundred and sixty, which at sixteen knots makes it a ten-hour run. That would put her abeam the lightship at six. I don't remember the distance from Babylon to the inlet, but I should say at a guess it was about five miles."

"Nearer eight."

"Eighteen miles, then, to the lightship." He glanced at his watch and shook his head. "Supposing that it takes us an hour to make the run to Babylon your launch would have to do twenty knots to keep the date. Being a party boat she will probably do about ten."

Such a spasm of bitter disappointment crossed her face that he quickly offered a word of cheer. "Just the same, I think it more than probable that we can make it."

"How?"

"Because ships coming in at that hour

usually slow down. It doesn't make much difference what time they get up to quarantine as they have to wait until morning for the health and immigration officers. We've still got a sporting chance if it stays clear. Even if it thickens up we should hear her whistle. We might hear several though. I suppose you want to pick up something chucked overboard?"

She did not answer and Phineas looked curiously at her face, then asked: "Why did you pick me out for the job?"

"I didn't. The men I had picked were not available by the time I got word."

"So that was it! How do you know that I may not double-cross you? Not that it would be quite that, however. You know the character the baron gave me."

She turned sharply, looked intently at his eyes, then threw back her head with a mocking little laugh.

"That's what gives me confidence. Any fool could have told that the old dear was trying to put me off the track."

Phineas smiled. It struck him that the wily old Jew was right in doubting the success of his stratagem; that this girl was not of the

ordinary. For the first time since meeting her he was forced to admit that Evelyn Crosby was right about her beauty of face. Excitement had stripped away its teasing elfin mask so that now it seemed to thrill and scintillate with some vibrant temperamental quality. Her eyes were like points of golden flame, her cheeks a delicate pink and her lips a scarlet streak. She roused in him something more than mere admiration. It was that same perverse impulse to lay hold of her; to compel some recognition of himself as a masculine personality.

They bulked into the slip with a complaining whine followed by the chatter of the pawls, and a moment later were threading their way through the ramshackle suburb, then out onto a road which proved fairly fast. It was one of those raw humid days in late winter when the snow appears a vehicle for filth, and shabby edifices look most dreary and forlorn. Darkness was not far away and their driver was pushing the strong car a little beyond the safety limit on the greasy track. Phineas was watching the weather anxiously. He knew that fog would make their task not only difficult but dangerous. This might be counted

on almost with certainty if the wind freshened from its present quarter.

They passed through several towns and arrived in Babylon just as it was getting dark. A drizzle of rain had begun to fall and few people were about. The chauffeur appeared to know the way and drove down to a wharf where a bulky motor boat, broad of beam and about thirty feet water line, was moored head out to a staging which was almost awash.

"Sylph—that's our boat," murmured Miss Melton. "Hurry now, before anybody comes. We've no time to waste talking." She handed the chauffeur a bill. "Back to the garage."

Thoroughly infused with her excited haste Phineas whipped up the suitcase, stepped aboard and stowed it in the small trunk cabin, which was scarcely more than a locker or possible shelter in case of rain. He observed as he did so that there were sailing lights, compass, horn and a large dinner bell in a rack, but he did not see anything in the nature of a chart. Still, that might be in one of the lockers, and what was more important, there were stowed up in the forepeak an anchor with a coil of line and three five-gallon tins of gaso-

line. A quick examination showed the fuel tank to have been filled.

The motor was a simple and powerful two-cylinder affair with make-and-break ignition, noisy but dependable, the sort of engine on which the fishermen and lobstermen along the coast hang their lives in offshore work. It seemed to Phineas that it ought to kick the shallow tub along at a good ten-knot gait. The boat itself though battered and dingy appeared to be sound and staunch so far as one could see.

Nobody appearing on the scene Phineas cast off from the staging and started the motor, no lady's undertaking. At the third or fourth heave of the heavy flywheel it got away with a series of barking coughs and they headed out across the bay.

Night had fallen, but there was, as Phineas had anticipated, a luminosity to the early darkness, and the tide being at the flood he cut straight across for the dull intermittent glow of the Fire Island Light. The boat ran strongly and well and Phineas gave the engine full gas, knowing from experience that one of its primitive sort was not apt to suffer from being driven but on the contrary was inclined

to run more evenly. He did not rig his side lights, there being no danger of collision, but he asked Miss Melton to light them and close the doors of the cabin.

She went inside and presently emerged with a bottle of red wine, some sandwiches and hard boiled eggs.

"I may drown you, but I don't intend to starve you," said she.

"Happy thought. One drowns more comfortably after having dined."

"It would be a cold business though." She looked at the black water and shook her head. "And the worst is it might easily happen."

"Are you trying to get my goat? Because I keep it in a perfectly safe place."

"I don't know anything about your goat, but I might as well tell you now that we are not the only ones out to scavenge behind this ship."

"What do you mean?"

"It's a smuggling trick, an old one worked in a new way. Somebody aboard drops a string of little boxes fastened together at long intervals, and his accomplices following the

steamer in a boat pick them up. At least I suppose that is the way it is managed."

Phineas stared at her in dismay. "But, good Lord, then we've got a fight ahead! This is no woman's job."

"It is my job—and yours, as it happens."

"Sure! How did you get on to it?"

"Coming in on the last ship. The sailing was delayed. I was looking for something of the sort. Leaning over the rail on the port side I saw half a dozen or more of these little boxes dropped out of a porthole. They seemed to be fastened together. Once in the water they probably stretch out over a considerable distance. Of course there is a notice posted forbidding anybody to throw anything overboard, and there are watchmen on deck. But they can't very well prevent a person from unscrewing a porthole and shoving something out."

"Did you report it?"

"No. I located the stateroom and found that it belonged the three perfectly harmless Y. M. C. A. workers who were peaceably eating their dinner at the time. Somebody slipped into their room and did the trick.

The ship was short-handed for stewards and they were all serving at table."

"Did you hear or see any boat following?"

"I thought I heard a motor, but could not be sure. Of course there must have been a boat. This was about twenty minutes after we had passed the lightship."

Phineas was silent for a moment, then asked: "Have you any particular reason for thinking that the same trick may be worked this trip?"

"I think that it will be tried," she answered in her limpid voice, "but I do not think that it will be worked."

"Why not?"

"Because, my dear confrère"—the cool voice held a note of mockery—"you and I are out here to prevent it."

For a moment Phineas was strongly tempted to put the boat about and head back for Babylon. Having his full share of courage he had no fears on his own account. But he reasoned that a crew of smugglers in a craft probably similar to their own were not going to give up their plunder without a struggle.

No, it was a job for at least half a dozen well-armed men. And here they were—one

man who would have his work cut out handling the boat, and a young girl who without reference to her ability with a pistol would stand an excellent chance of getting shot. Phineas gave her credit for the common sense not to have planned it thus. She had referred to the men on whom she had counted, and who had failed her. Lacking their aid she had calmly decided to take a chance, a very sinister chance, and tackle the ugly business with his sole assistance.

It was in a way a compliment to both his honesty and his ability, but it was not one for which he greatly cared. He said as much to his companion, rather heatedly. A little to his surprise she made no attempt to defend her position.

"You are quite right, captain," said she. "I had hoped to manage it much better, but we are none of us infallible. My plans went wrong at the eleventh hour. I realize that it seems foolish to go ahead with it, but there are two excellent reasons for our doing so: One is that if people in our employment were to shirk a job because it was dangerous they would never accomplish anything at all; anyhow we are in danger all the time. The other

reason is that I believe a haul like this to be a very rich one. The stake seems to justify the odds, and for all we know there may be some clew as to what is actually going on."

"All the same, I'd feel like a criminal to let you risk it."

"Why? It's all in my day's work. Since we are pals I don't mind telling you that I am an agent of the French Secret Service and detailed at present to discover whether war loot, either enemy or stripped from the enemy, is being shipped out of France. I am working this end of it. We are not particularly interested in the defrauding of Uncle Sam's revenues, but we want to know if this is an established commerce directed by some organization, and if so, what sort—German or French or what. I have instructions not to take the American Secret Service into my confidence if it can possibly be avoided."

"Why not?"

"We think that there are too many in it; that it is over-recruited with amateurs. Where that happens there are bound to be leaks. You, I imagine, are working privately for Rosenthal and some of his former associates

among the dealers. He was at one time a big independent gem broker himself—may yet have a hand in it for all I know. But Rosenthal is honest. He used to be a gory pirate but he is all right now.”

“A reformed pirate?”

“Scarcely that. A retired pirate. But he was always a pirate in a legitimate way: a fearful person in a deal but a man of his word. Everybody admits that.”

“Well,” said Phineas, “if you insist we’ll go ahead with the devilish job; but I must say I hate it like poison—on your account, of course.”

“There is no reason why you should any more than if I were a man. I think that there is something rather fine about exposing oneself to danger in an effort to return their property to the poor people from whom it was looted. Probably in many cases it’s about all they have left. A few thousand francs might make the difference of life and death. You must think about my position as you would about that of a nurse or Salvation Army woman going ahead with her work at the Front with bombs and shells and things dropping round her.”

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"I think you're a corker. We'll put it across." Phineas held out his hand. "Never mind the strength test."

They were by this time more than halfway to the inlet. It was several years since Phineas had been in the Great South Bay, that big shallow puddle where in most places a man capsized might stand on bottom and right his boat, this built somewhat on the lines of a flounder and able to float in a heavy dew. The two and a half feet of tide made it possible for them to hold a straight course and presently Phineas was able to see the white gleam of the snow on Sexton Island and the strip of sand beyond, while the faint easterly draft of air brought the dull roar of the Atlantic swell as it boomed upon the beach outside.

The tide had begun to ebb and soon the boat caught the suck of its swift current and rushed seaward with half again the speed. She struck the breakers and squattered through them like a wounded duck, then commenced to rise and fall on the long rhythmic ground swell.

"Are you as good a sailor as you are a sport?" Phineas asked.

"I know nothing whatever about small boats, but I've never been seasick."

"More than I can say, but there's nothing here to bother one. Can you swim?"

"No, but I don't need to." She pointed to the life preservers, which the law now requires all sail and motor craft to carry.

"It might not be a bad idea to put one on. That kapok is good to stop a bullet."

"All right; let's. In our business it's just as foolish to take an unnecessary chance as it is not to take any at all. And, captain —"

"Mam'selle?"

"If it comes to shooting, we're to shoot to kill."

"Right-o. Anybody trading in stuff looted from war victims needs killing out here just as much as at the Front."

"More. It's just about the meanest of all mean businesses. The soldier risks his life and may feel that he has some right to the spoils of war. These slinking hyenas count on enriching themselves at the expense of war victims without running any danger."

"Quite so. Robbing a savings bank is fairly decent compared to their graft. Don't worry, mam'selle. If it comes to a scrap you will

not find me a conscientious objector. Neither shall I behave like the noble movie hero who gets the villain where he wants him, then magnanimously lets him off to serve him a pup soon after. There is the lightship dead ahead. I just got the glow. Lucky this is drizzle instead of fog. This swell is getting bigger and shorter. Must be a breeze of wind not far to the eastward."

"Do you think that we are in time?"

"Yes. The weather is probably thick farther out and up the coast and the ship running at reduced speed. It is more probable that she may be a couple of hours late than that she has already passed. How did you happen to become a French Secret Service agent?"

"Through doing journalistic work. I was reporter for a socialist sheet, *La Fraternité*. That got me mixed up with the police. Though I am of American parentage I was born in France, and not having declared myself American on coming of age I am French in the eyes of the French authorities. My passport is French. They took me on the first year of the war. You see, I knew a good many uncertain people, and I speak French

and German and Italian and English, so they thought I would be useful."

"They thought right. There's a ship out yonder, but it is not ours. Some tank or freighter."

"Why so?"

"A liner would be showing deck and cabin lights, now that the submarine danger is over. We'd get the glow of them. Here comes the breeze—out of the northeast."

"It's beginning to snow."

"Yes. It will be sloppy out here in another hour or two. Jolly boating weather, I don't think! And we can't get back into the bay until daylight, I'm afraid. Life is full of surprises these days. I thought that my chance of adventure was finished with the war. I should weep."

The big boat was pounding steadily seaward and before long the lightship was close aboard. Phineas ran some distance outside it, then stopped the engine. "No use wasting gas," said he, and emptied one of the five-gallon tins into the fuel tank. The wind was freshening a strong steady draft and it was growing colder. The snow had become fine and driving but not thick enough greatly to ob-

scure the atmosphere and Phineas thought that a steamer's masthead lights should have a visibility of two or three miles at least

For about an hour they drifted, the beamy boat wallowing in the short chop which crossed the long swell. Twice Phineas started the motor and worked back to their position. He did not like the look of things. The wind was growing harder, seemed to promise a gale, and the snow was beginning to assume the aspect of a blizzard. The low tide with the line of breakers across its mouth would bar the inlet to them for the next ten hours and he doubted that they had fuel enough for the run of nearly fifty miles to the shelter of Gravesend Bay.

Then as they were floundering about he heard the distant muffled bellow of a big ship's whistle. Again it sounded, and twice more, each time closer. He started the engine and headed cautiously out in that direction. Suddenly there came a blast startlingly close aboard, which was answered from the light-ship, and through the flying snow they saw a vivid glare. Phineas put his helm hard over and, when the steamer had passed about four hundreds yards away, turned again to cut

across her wake. Strains of music reached their ears faintly and emphasized the dreariness of their position.

Directly astern of the ship he swung into her course, which was easy to follow both because of the sudsy brine eddying in her wake and their running squarely before the wind. He was by no means sure that he could keep the dull glow of her taffrail light in sight, this depending on her speed, which might be a little more than they were able to make; but he soon discovered he had either underestimated that of the motor boat or, what was more probable, the steamer had reduced her own, as he was obliged to slow down a little to keep from overhauling.

And so for nearly an hour they tagged along astern, keeping a sharp lookout on the bland swirling water and with spirits sinking lower and lower as no floating object appeared to reward their venturesome efforts. The weather was getting worse and worse but the sea was not troublesome, partly because they were running before it and partly because the great bulk ahead flattened it out in her displacement. Phineas began to wonder if they would have gasoline enough to follow

the ship into the pilot-station boat, then cut across for Gravesend Bay. The present danger was in running out of fuel and then the wind backing into the northwest to blow them out to sea.

Giving Miss Melton the wheel he measured the gasoline in the tank, then shook his head and poured in the contents of the second tin. The powerful but primitive motor swilled its food like a swine. Phineas was pondering the situation when the girl reached out and gripped him by the arm.

"There's another motor boat ahead!" Phineas stared forward into the murk. For a moment he could see nothing but the seething water and the faint glimmer of the steamer's taffrail light. Then in an eddy of the driving snow he caught a glimpse of a dark bulky object as it rose on the swell about two hundreds yards ahead. At the same moment he heard the whir of a rapidly revolving motor distinctly audible between the staccato barks of their own exhaust.

There could be no doubt. It was the smuggler's boat, which must have cut in close under the steamer's stern. Phineas did not believe that those aboard her had discov-

ered the Sylph. Their attention would be riveted upon the big ship and her wake. Then, to see the Sylph they would have to stare into the storm with its blinding snow while the steady rattle of their own fast-turning jump-spark motor gave no interval in which to hear the Sylph's more widely punctuated cough.

Something had to be done, and that quickly if they were not to fail. The smugglers had probably flashed a signal, and at any moment the contraband might be dropped from a cabin porthole. Phineas doubted that there would be more than two of them. The fewer the better for such a job; and the fewer among whom to divide. In fact, there might be but a single man. At any rate it was a chance that had to be taken. They were in too nasty a position to give up without a struggle. He gave the boat full gas, then a couple of spokes of wheel and took a sheer to starboard.

Miss Melton read wrongly his maneuver. It seemed to her that he was giving up the attempt; that his nerve had failed at the crucial moment. She sprang toward him, and even

in the darkness he caught the flame in her wide eyes.

"What are you doing?"

"Get your pistol ready. I'm going to make a loop and bear down on them from abeam. If they beat it, all right. If they don't I'll try to dump their apple cart."

His plan was a sound one. The Sylph was heavily built, broad of beam, with bluff bows and low freeboard. Phineas did not know of what type the other boat was but thought it probable that she was of a fast cruiser model with no great amount of stability. He was certain that if he could work out and make his turn so as to bear down upon her from a little forward of the beam and strike her amidships with the swell of his starboard bow she would crack like an egg and roll over like a log.

He did not dare risk a ram head-on. From ahead this might capsize them both, and to cut into her broadside at the speed she was making would probably tear off or open up his own bows. He must strike her a heavy but glancing blow at an angle of about forty-five degrees. Such a collision ought not greatly to risk his own boat, Phineas thought,

as the Sylph was half-decked forward, while the flare of her run would take the shock on the level of her sheer strake.

Wherefore, with the engine running full, he started to edge off and work ahead. But Phineas in his impatience—for he reasoned that the contraband might now be dropped at any moment to be hooked up by the other and faster boat—took too close a distance, and as he hauled abreast about two hundred yards ahead the smugglers sighted him. Their boat swerved sharply to port and with a sudden acceleration of the motor dived into the gloom and was lost to sight.

"Bluffed out, by Jiminy!" Phineas howled triumphantly.

He turned the wheel a few spokes and was swinging back into the steamer's wake when Miss Melton gave a ringing cry.

"Look! There! There!"

She was pointing to the water off the port quarter, and staring in that direction Phineas saw what at first sight resembled a number of small puffs of spume. Then he discovered that they were rectangular. The boat had already passed them and a second later they had disappeared from view. But Phineas had

them located and he nearly twisted off the wheel in an effort to put immediately about. The result was to slow and nearly stop the heavy tub, which turned slowly, then headed back in the ship's wake.

And then an unexpected thing occurred. Whether the smugglers had sighted the jet-tisoned loot or whether they were merely maneuvering for a surprise attack Phineas could not have said. Perhaps their purpose was precisely what his own had been—to strike bow on. At any rate as the Sylph was gathering way again their speed launch came slipping out of the smother headed straight for the floating contraband, her broadside presented to the other boat.

There was but one thing left to do. "Stand by for a ram!" yelled Phineas, and grabbed up his automatic. Not fifty yards separated the two, and the Sylph had struck her gait. Bluff bows to the gale she bore down upon the launch. If those aboard her realized the danger they had no time to dodge, either to shoot ahead or avoid a ram by going hard astern. They tried to swerve and take a slanting blow but were too late. Phineas caught a fleeting glimpse of two figures and saw the flame lick

out from their barking pistols. He felt a violent tug at the kapok life preserver he had on.

Then the Sylph struck the launch full amidships with a fearful grinding crash. Half through the light shell she went, at the same time rolling it under keel. A yell rang out, was choked, and the two boats ground together with the heave of the angry chop. Phineas reversed and the Sylph seemed to shake her head and haul away as though reluctantly. She backed off into the murk and Phineas grabbed at his companion, who appeared to have fallen across the coaming, halfway out of the boat. He thought that she was shot, probably killed, and felt for a moment as if he were suffocating. No treasure was worth such a price.

The motor gave a grunt and stopped. Phineas scarcely noticed. Hauling desperately to get his shipmate inboard he thought his heart would burst when he heard her cry: "Don't pull. Just hold me by the legs. She squirmed farther across the coaming and he gripped her round the knees. "That's it," she panted. "There, I've got it! Now haul me in."

Phineas obeyed. He gave a mighty heave just as a big wave heeled the boat, and he landed on his back with the girl sprawling across him. As he struggled up she lay there laughing, and the mellow lilt of mirth coming thus on top of tragedy struck Phineas as weirdly strange. He glanced down at her and saw that she was holding up one of the white boxes for him to take.

"I'm—out of—breath," she gasped. "They—are all fastened—together. Haul them in."

Phineas did not immediately obey. He stared to windward, listened, but could neither hear nor see anything but the wind and waves and swirling snow. Seized by a sudden thought he dived into the cabin and crept forward, one of the sailing lights in hand. There were trickling sounds, a swashing underneath, and he was shocked to see the water flowing through the opened seams in broad flat bands. The lateral wrench had started the boat to leaking badly; just how badly he could not immediately tell.

Clambering out of the cabin he found Miss Melton tugging vainly at the strong cod line to which the boxes were fastened, like a trawl.

"It's jammed or caught or something!" she

cried; and with a sudden shock of alarm Phineas realized what had stopped the motor.

"We fouled the darn line and wound it up on the tail shaft when I backed off," said he, and looked over the side.

Another box was bobbing against the boat. He picked it up and started to haul in the line to which it was made fast. One end of this was jammed under the stern. On the other length there was a box about every thirty or forty feet. There were ten of these in all, and as he drew the last aboard Miss Melton clapped her hands.

"We've done it!" she cried exultantly.

"Yes," growled Phineas, "we have done it. The boat is leaking like a sieve, and the propeller's jammed, and it's starting in to blow a gale, and we haven't gas enough to get in out of it. Hooray!"

He wrenched up the flooring, flashed his torch at what was underneath and gave a gasp of dismay. The boat was filling rapidly.

"Get that bucket in the cabin and start bailing," said he. "Unless I can get this coffee mill to grinding pretty quick we're apt to stow this loot in Davy Jones' locker."

As the shaft had wound up the line while

going astern he now tried to unreel it by turning the engine over ahead, but this effort was unavailing. Switching on the current he managed to get a revolution or two, then the motor stopped firing. There was no time to be lost in vain endeavor. The water was gaining rapidly. The bucket was quicker than the pump, but Phineas knew that at the rate they were filling both together would not keep them very long afloat. He ripped off his life preserver, slipped out of his ulster and opened his knife.

"What are you going to do?" Miss Melton paused in her bailing.

"Get overboard and try to cut us loose. Don't stop! Keep at it for all you're worth! It's our only chance."

He lowered himself over the stern and for a moment or two the icy water was paralyzing. Then he got his breath and set desperately to work. Fortunately the boat was light of draft so that he did not have to get head under, but the small tough line seemed twisted and plaited and hard as wire cable. Phineas was in an agony of fear lest he break a blade of the small pocketknife or that it slip from his numbed fingers. After the first few

minutes he did not seem to feel the cold. The sensibility of his skin was deadened.

Meanwhile as he worked to cut through and unreel the line the storm was getting worse and the heavy boat drifting sluggishly before it. Having no headway the motion was not enough to interfere greatly with his efforts and presently he had cleared the last strand and called for Miss Melton to help him clamber aboard. He had expected this to be a difficult job, but to his amazement the girl gripped him under both arms and as he put out as much strength as he was able she swung him up across the stern with no more apparent difficulty than if he had been a child.

"You're not quite human—your strength, I mean," he panted.

"Don't talk nonsense. You had better lose no time in starting the engine. The water is gaining fast."

Phineas looked down and saw that it was so. The cockpit flooring was awash. Another six inches and it would reach the carburetor. He primed the cylinder, gave a heave of the crank and the motor started with a roar. Phineas flashed his light on the compass, noted

the bearing of the wind and laid the boat abeam to it.

"Take the wheel," said he to Miss Melton. "and steer just as we are heading now."

"I don't know how to steer."

"You'll soon catch on to it. Turn the wheel a little toward the side you want to go."

"But I don't know where I want to go."

"Well, keep right across the waves."

"Are you trying to be funny? The waves are everywhere."

Phineas gave a groan. It was no use. "All right; keep on bailing, then, and I'll pump and give her a twist from time to time."

"How do you know where to go?"

"I don't. But if we steer west nor'west we should bump the beach at the nearest point. That is good enough for me. I am not particular about the choice of a seaside resort this moment."

The wind, as Phineas had feared, was backing into the north and it was getting rapidly colder. But he had slipped his ulster over his wet clothes and this and his exertions kept him from getting chilled. But the water gained upon them steadily, and fearing that the heaving wallow of the boat might swash

it into the air intake of the carburetor Phineas picked up one of the boxes, cut the line away and knotted it together. These boxes were of the sort that fashionable jewelers use for the packing and shipping of such small articles as christening cups and the like, neatly made of pine or poplar, and in this case they had been rendered waterproof. It was Phineas' idea to cut a hole in the top of the box, take out the contents and fit the carburetor into it.

He was working at the thin wood with the point of his knife when Miss Melton looked round to see why he had stopped pumping. For an instant she seemed petrified. The next that Phineas knew he found himself sprawling on his back across the wheel, the box snatched from his hands. Scrambling up, astonished, he saw his girl shipmate facing him, half crouched as though to spring at the least offensive on his part, and her eyes seemed to be of an uncanny incredible width and their glare to burn through the snow and spindrift.

As Phineas stared at her his startled amazement was swept away in a gust of furious anger. He realized what had inspired her act of violence. She had evidently thought he had taken advantage of her vigorous bailing to

pilfer the contents of the box. The blood surged into his head. If it had been a man there would have been trouble in that moment. Even as it was this may not have been far removed. There was nothing feminine about the force with which he had been flung across the wheel. The spokes had punched into the small of his back most painfully.

For a moment or two he swayed there, fighting for his self-control. The impulse to fling himself upon her was almost irresistible. Their precarious position seemed insignificant in face of this insult. Its injustice infuriated him after the service which he had rendered her; was still rendering. Of course he was not for the moment quite himself. The turmoil through which they had just passed and the chaotic wildness of their surroundings made violence in order.

With a tremendous effort he got himself in hand. The boat, also, required his immediate attention. Under full power she did not run quite true, but carried a slight starboard helm, and this now released she began to haul into the wind. A heavy wave broke against her bluff bow and swept them with a sheet of water. Choking back his rage

Phineas grabbed the wheel and paid her off. As he did so the girl reached in her pocket, then flashed her torch on the box. She looked curiously at Phineas, puzzled apparently at his having started to cut a round hole in the top instead of merely prying it off.

But she asked no questions; and he, filled with furious disgust, did not enlighten her. It was more than furious disgust, being the reaction from intense admiration and a rapidly growing sentiment of warm comradeship. He felt a sudden indifference as to what might happen next, and this was full of fatal possibilities. They might at any moment ship a heavy sea, which would stall the motor permanently, for the boat was getting sluggish, had lost her buoyancy. Should this happen they might as well abandon hope. The tide was ebbing, the wind slowly backing to blow off the land. No human being could live long in that icy water.

Steering in sullen silence Phineas watched the girl attach the line again to a screw eye in the box, then resume her tireless bailing. And scarcely had she finished when in a flaw of the wind Phineas heard the booming roar of breakers and saw a white band on the sea ahead.

Chapter IX

PHINEAS PLUNKETT steadied the wheel with his knee and slipped on his life preserver. Now that the crucial moment was at hand he put aside his smoldering anger, almost hatred, and thought only of his manly duty to Miss Melton.

He knew that he could not hope to beach the boat. Open as she was, and low, the first line of breakers would fill her. Their best chance would be to leap out when this happened and depend upon their life preservers.

The motor was pounding away heroically. Phineas leaned forward and raised his voice to a shout.

"Stop bailing and stand by to swim for it!"

Miss Melton dropped the bucket and straightened up. She looked ahead, heard the terrifying roar of the surf and saw the white glare of spume and the snow-covered dunes beyond.

"I can't swim." There was no despairing tone to her clear voice. It was merely that of one stating a fact.

"The life belt will float you. The moving water ought to wash us ashore."

Phineas dived into the cabin, cut a three-fathom length from the anchor line and caught a turn round his body. The other end he secured about the waist of the girl. Then catching up a bight of the line which secured the boxes he made it fast to his belt with a slip hitch.

The boat was forging strongly ahead, her actual weight of water being about that of her customary load of passengers. The swells began to mount, to topple. Searching the shore Phineas could see no sign of any light or habitation. It occurred to him too late that he might have been flashing his torch, to be seen possibly by a coast guard, though its visibility would have been of short range through the driving snow. The chances are that he would have thought of this but for the preoccupation of his anger and the savage indifference it had produced. He cursed the incident which had engendered it.

A brimming swell lifted them sluggishly, its combing crest sloshing into the boat. The next flung them forward and crumbled aboard. The motor gave a strangled cough and

stopped. The boat yawed off and came broad-side on, her stern up the line of the beach. This was what Phineas had hoped for, as it gave them a chance to get clear. He gathered up the boxes and flung them overboard; then as the next big comber mounted and curled he seized the girl about the waist and as the wave crashed down leaped out into the driving water.

For a moment or two they were whirled over and over, sucked back a little, driven ahead again. The paralyzing cold stopped the respiration for a few seconds, so that they did not get much water in their lungs. Phineas, a good swimmer and accustomed to surf bathing, was in no difficulty and kept his faculties sufficiently to see that they were being washed rapidly in to the beach, the life preservers, which were new and buoyant, floating them well. Fortunately the beach was not steep, the tide nearly at the last of the ebb and there was but little undertow. He grasped the girl under the arm and as they were swept shoreward by a long crumbling surge his feet touched bottom.

The girl had kept her head, holding her breath as the wash swept over it and gasping

for air as opportunity offered. Assisted by Phineas she was able to wade out and they staggered up the beach and sank down on the sand, breathing heavily. The boxes were washing back and forth at the water's edge and her first act was to reach feebly for the line and haul them in. Phineas gave a harsh laugh.

"Your precious loot is safe," said he. "Are you able to walk?"

"I—I think so."

"Then let's get going. We'll soon freeze if we don't."

He gathered up the boxes and looped them from his shoulders, then rose to his feet and held out his hand. Miss Melton took it, scrambled up and stood for a moment swaying unsteadily.

"Do you know where we are?"

"Not precisely. But if we keep on going we ought to strike a life-saving station or something. Come on."

"I—I don't think I can go very far."

She staggered unsteadily on her feet.

Phineas looked at her in despair. She was too big a girl for him to carry any distance and he felt that if he were to leave her there

and go to seek assistance she would be found dead when it arrived. Physical exertion was imperative, so he got his arm about her and they started unsteadily down the beach, assisted by the gale behind them.

For about half a mile they proceeded thus. Then he felt her weight beginning to increase and her steps to lag. They had apparently struck upon a wild and desolate strip of sand—an island, he thought, cut off by inlets at either end and flanked by the maze of marshes at the lower end of the Great South Bay. He had nearly reached the limits of his own strength to support her when through the flying snow he saw between the snow-covered dunes an opaque mass bulking against the less somber sky.

It proved to be a lonely summer cottage, a shabby edifice with windows boarded up, a protesting refuge and one difficult of entry for a pair of freezing castaways with no tools but their numbed hands. Phineas managed to win his way round under its lee and this unexpected shelter appeared to infuse his shipmate with fresh strength, for she remained standing, her back against the house,

feebly moving her arms to start the circulation.

But it was of vital necessity to get into the house at once, no matter how scant the hospitality it might have to offer. Phineas reflected that there must at any rate be a cooking stove and that lacking fuel he could break up the doors and cupboards and what poor furniture there might be. The snow was thinning, the wind harder and more westerly, and being weatherwise for that region he knew that before morning it would be bitterly cold and probably clear.

He passed round the bungalow to investigate the rear, and fortune seemed to favor him, for he found on a heap of driftwood gathered on the beach an oar with a broken blade. This proved an excellent lever with which to attack the boarding ~~over~~ the back door, but much to Phineas' surprise instead of being nailed it swung open on hinges set inside, while the lock of the door itself yielded to the mere pressure of his shoulder.

Much elated by this good luck he hurried back to Miss Melton and helped her in, then tried his torch and found that the water had not got in to put it out of action. And then

came a most astonishing and gratifying discovery, for this lonely weatherbeaten bungalow, scarcely more than a good-sized cabin and so dilapidated without, appeared to be not only fully furnished but newly and comfortably so. It was snugly sealed within and as he flashed his torch about the kitchen Phineas discovered signs of recent occupation. The shelves were well garnished with tinned food, even relishes and delicacies. He found a box of matches and went from one to the other of the four rooms lighting the lamps, which were already filled.

"I understand," said he to Miss Melton, his resentment against her forgotten in his relief. "Some chap has fixed this place up as a shooting box. The marshes behind here are good places for ducks at this season and a man could get down here from town in a couple of hours. The coast guard probably keeps an eye on the place."

"We can do without the coast guard just now," said Miss Melton wearily. "Will you please start the fire?"

Phineas hastened to do so. There was a provision of coal and wood, and the small interior began speedily to heat. Further in-

spection proved to Phineas the truth of his theory. Tacked on the walls were colored lithographs of hunting scenes. In the living room were a couple of folding bunks for extra guests, and a gun rack in which were two fowling pieces of an old model and showing evidence of long service. There were two bedrooms, a double bed in one of them and two single in the other. These had evidently been freshly made and the sheets and blankets and cotton comforters were clean and new.

Opening all the doors, that the heat might find its way throughout, Phineas next discovered a closet in which were oilskins, sou'westers, canvas shooting coats, gunny sacks, all well worn; and on a shelf a heap of heavy woolen underclothes and pyjamas, all freshly laundered. Considering the drenched condition of himself and Miss Melton he appreciated the value of this find, and taking down two pairs of the pyjamas he hung them over a chair close to the stove. While doing so he noticed that the sink was fitted with a hand pump, and on trying this he got an immediate flow of water from the cistern beneath. He filled the kettle and a couple

of saucepans and placed them on the stove.

"This chap has things very snug and practical," he observed. "His guide can telephone him when there is a flight of ducks or snipe, and all he has to do is to hop a train, get off and into his motor boat and be out here in a couple of hours."

No answer came from the dripping figure huddled close to the glowing stove. Phineas looked anxiously at the girl. Though still very sore he had decided to see the adventure through in as friendly a manner as though nothing unpleasant had occurred, and thenceforth to eschew her acquaintance.

"How do you feel now?" he asked gently.

She did not answer. Her face was pale, eyes heavy lidded and staring at the stove. Phineas thought she looked less prostrated than one might expect considering what she had been through. An hour's vigorous bailing with a heavy bucket was in itself enough to exhaust most women, to say nothing of being half drowned in the icy water. He had himself reacted well to both his recent immersions, but then he was fresh from training camp.

"I am going in to change," said he. "You

must do the same, here by the stove. Then go in the other room and get in bed. Call me when you are ready and I shall fill some hot-water bottles and make you some tea or coffee. Please do as I say. There is no sense in winning out a scrap with smugglers and having a close squeak from drowning only to die of the flu. That's what may happen if you do not change at once.

Still she did not answer; did not so much as acknowledge his presence with a flicker of her long lashes.

Phineas felt his anger rising again, but smothered it and said: "If it will make you feel any happier I may as well tell you that you were quite wrong about that box. I had not the slightest intention of stealing its contents; never thought about them, in fact. I wanted it to keep the water out of the carburetor. It was threatening to slosh in at any moment, and if it had we should have drowned. That is what did finally stop the motor, just before we jumped."

She raised her head suddenly. Her tawny eyes flashed like gold in the yellow light of the lamp.

"Ah! So that was it?"

"Of course! You might have had a little faith; also a little sense. Why should I have started laboriously to cut a round hole when I might have pried up the lid? And every moment precious at the pump! I gave you credit for more power of deduction; also for being a better judge of people. To be quite frank, your acumen is by no means on the same high plane as your courage. Possibly the former may account for the latter."

"What do you mean?"

"That if you had a little more intelligence you might not have quite so much blind daring. However, this is not the time to quarrel. We might better be down on our knees thanking God for having given us a staunch boat and a furnished cottage. Now, unless you are courting pneumonia you will immediately take off your wet clothes and dry yourself with a good rub and put on those warm pyjamas and get into bed."

Without another glance at her angry glowing eyes he took a pair of the garments in question and went into the farther bedroom, closing the door behind him.

He was giving his lean but muscular body a rubbing down so vigorous as to be almost

painful, preparatory to incasing it in heavy woolens and pyjamas, when his eye was caught by an object on a shelf fitted into a corner of the room. The room was on the windy corner of the house and cold, but for the instant oblivious of this Phineas stood stark and staring, his heart action suddenly accelerated.

The simple object which had so startled him was nothing but a clock. But it was not an ordinary clock; at least it was not such a clock as one might expect to find in the shooting cabin of a South Bay duck hunter. Naked to the cold if not the winds Phineas crossed the room, took it from the shelf and held it under the glare of the lamp. It was a small square eight-day timepiece incased in tarnished brass of a Louis XVI design, and on the dial was the curved inscription of its maker: "Victor Simon, Quai de l'Horloge, Paris."

But this was not all. There was a peculiar quality to certain patches of its tarnish, quite distinct from verdigris, which at first suggested that the brass was merely a wash which had worn off in places to disclose the rusty metal beneath. It was not rust. It

was some brown scaly substance superimposed on the solid brass. Nor was it varnish. Phineas moistened his finger, scratched away a little of it with the nail. The stuff was not sticky, and it left a reddish smear. There could be no question. It was blood!

The clock itself was like several he had seen in the window of Durand Brothers. If this store had been on the East Side, near the Long Island ferry, one might have considered the possibility of the duck hunter's purchasing it on the way to his shooting box. Perhaps he was a German with the national passion for clocks and had been seized by the whim to buy one for his lodge. But Durand Brothers was on the west side of the city. Moreover, the clock was evidently a real antique and as such of a certain value certainly not the sort of timepiece for a dilapidated cabin on the beach. It did not match up with the other furnishings, which though good of their sort were simple and inexpensive. A sixty-five-cent alarm clock would have been more fitting for a double reason, the second being the alarm.

Herewith opened before the startled Phineas a tidal wave of astounding possibilities.

Yet were they so astounding after all? Supposing that the sporting features of the cabin were primarily a blind for a more sinister employment of it? The two functions could be easily combined. The smugglers might run down for two or three days, spend part of them on the marsh with their decoys, and a night or two off-shore. They could divide their time between pleasure and business. There was probably a narrow inlet near, by which a lift-draft motor boat could run in and out at high tide.

A shiver not entirely of cold brought Phineas back to a recollection of the prevailing pandemic. "No use getting the flu over it," he muttered, and climbed into the heavy flannels of what he was now disposed to regard as their late owner. He felt very little doubt that this hospitable cabin was indeed the secret rendezvous of those whom he had sent to their final reckoning within the last three hours; their point of departure and return. He had encountered them directly off this spot. The house had given him an atmosphere of recent occupation on his entering it. To be sure the stove was cold, but they would not have been apt to leave a fire burning. Very pos-

sibly they had put out directly from the mainland. At any rate he did not see how they could possibly have escaped death. Phineas felt no fear of interruption.

Picking up the comforter he wrapped it about himself and sat down on the edge of the bed to reflect. From the newness of its furnishings he felt certain the cabin had been fitted out after hostilities had stopped. Before the armistice anybody to occupy it would have been under the closest scrutiny of the coast patrol; would probably not have been permitted there at all. He determined to question the coast guard, but not until some days later. He would return there for the purpose.

His next decision was to tell Miss Melton nothing at all of his conviction. In the first place she did not deserve it, and he remembered Rosenthal's caution to keep his own counsel and confide in nobody. But Phineas felt an intense desire to examine the contents of the boxes. To do so, and that immediately, was imperative. It was certain they must contain some clew.

As this thought was revolving in his mind his quick ear caught a splitting, splintering sound

from the other side of the thin partition that separated the two small bedrooms. The noise was very faint, scarcely audible in fact, and the chances are that if Phineas' mind had not been keyed to the same vibration he would not have noticed it at all. But coming just at that moment it acted on him like a sharp clap of the hands behind a man who lives in dread of assassination. He was on his feet in a flash, his head against the pine partition. Again came the faint splitting sound, and Phineas found it easy to analyze. The little boxes were securely fastened with long wire nails which could not be drawn without a special tool, nippers or a claw. Miss Melton having no such implement was prying up the cover with some other—a kitchen knife or something of the sort.

The anger and resentment, which Phineas had put aside through chivalry, returned with a compounded interest. Here was a woman, whose difficult and dangerous work he had undertaken without question and accomplished in a masterly way, now taking advantage of his solicitude for her welfare to steal a march on him and examine the loot without giving him the opportunity so much as to learn of

its character. He had just saved her life, to be given as a reward what crooks would call the double cross. She had used him as a pawn essential to a checkmate, quite necessary to make her play, and to be sacrificed if so required. She had insulted him, done him a physical violence—without offering apology for either. And at this moment she was stealthily engaged in cheating him out of a recompense that might be of infinite value to the accomplishment of his task and could not possibly cost her anything.

It struck Phineas that this was about as mean a trick as he had ever heard of. Not only did it rouse his bitter anger but a disgust which swept away the protective instinct that their position had roused in him. It made him ruthless, regardless of her sex.

Chapter X

SOFTLY opening his door Phineas crossed the living room and looked into the kitchen. Miss Melton had evidently followed his advice, as her dripping clothes were steaming on a chair close to the stove. The bedroom which she occupied was next to the kitchen, the door opening into the latter. Phineas rapped sharply and heard a sudden scuffling sound. He knew as clearly as though he could see her act that she was pushing the boxes under the bed.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Resting. Please don't disturb me. There is nothing that I want."

"Really? Well then, there is something that I want."

There was an instant's silence, then:
"What is it?"

"I want to see what is in those boxes; in fact, I insist upon seeing what is in them."

"That is impossible, I'm afraid. I am under strict orders not to let anybody know what I may discover. You have learned quite enough already."

Phineas' anger went up another notch.

"Do you think so? I'm very sorry, because I don't. It is outrageous—ridiculous. Here I've managed this thing for you and now you have the nerve to tell me that I'm not even to know what we have found."

"You know what is going on. That ought to be sufficient. You might otherwise have pottered round indefinitely without learning anything at all."

Phineas' patience began to slip its cogs. He tried the door and found it locked.

"Let me in!" said he sternly.

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"You know perfectly well that you have nothing to fear from me. I am a gentleman, but I am not altogether a fool and a dupe. It can do you no harm for me to see what those boxes contain."

"Perhaps you would like a share."

Her voice held the dulcet limpid tone which had so irritated Phineas on their first meeting. But now it did not irritate him. It infuriated him—that and the impudent, insulting words.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" said he, his own voice tremulous with anger. "You know that I don't claim any of the loot.

But I want to know what it consists of and if there is any clew to its source and consignment in any of the boxes. Now I've said enough. If you don't open this door immediately I shall open it myself."

"You—coward!"

"Oh, come, you know better than that! Are you going to do as I ask?"

"I am not! Haven't you any sense of chivalry? Do you mean to burst into my bedroom like a boche?"

"No. I am going to burst in like a man who has been shamefully duped and insulted. Haven't you any sense of gratitude? Of appreciation?"

"Oh, là, là, là!" The cool voice held a flippant tone. "The young man is beginning already to harp on the obligation I am under for having given him a chance to find out something about his job. You are the one who ought to be grateful." Her tone changed abruptly, became sharp, imperious. "Now that's enough! You can't come in. I've nothing on but those pyjamas. If you had any chivalry at all you would never think of asking such a thing. Go away. I want to sleep."

"You want to open those boxes. You have started to do so already. Is that your final refusal to let me in?"

"No. There is still a last word. If you try to force the door I shall assume that you intend some act of violence upon myself, and I shall put a bullet through you. I noticed that you left your automatic in the boat. I hung on to mine."

"Very well. Then you will have a chance to use it immediately."

If Phineas had felt any scruples up to this time these last words banished them. The appeal to his chivalry had cut deep, but followed by this threat its value became negative. The rush of anger it evoked swept away all respect for the girl, her person and character. She became to him no more than a sly, cold-blooded selfish intrigante. He could scarcely believe that she was capable of shooting him; but still, she might be. He was ready to take the chance. He felt that if he allowed himself to be cowed by her he would be ashamed for the rest of his life.

As has been said, the door opened into the kitchen, so that the hinges were on Phineas' side. These were of the usual sort, swinging

on a detachable pivot rod. It was necessary only to slip these out and exert a little prying pressure to remove the door. Phineas took out the rods, then glancing about the kitchen saw a hatchet hanging between two nails. Taking this he inserted the edge, pried gently, and the door fell off into his hands. He set it aside against the wall, then set foot upon the threshold.

In spite of his glowing anger the tableau presented was a startling one, and in more than a single way. Miss Melton was sitting on the edge of the bed facing him, arm bent, her automatic pistol leveled at his chest. She was in the voluminous pyjamas, which were several sizes too large for her, though a big girl, and of which she had rolled up the legs and sleeves in a manner to expose her bare round ankles and forearms. She had been drying her hair, which fell in shimmering waves cascading over her shoulders and bosom to swirl on the bed beside her in a golden-copper ruddy flood.

Phineas saw nothing but her extraordinary eyes, which gleamed at him through narrowed lids with a light in them more metallic than the yellow lamplight reflected from the bar-

rel of the automatic pistol. It was a peculiar glare, not only in its ruthlessness but in a strange mocking quality—one might almost say amusement—of an inhuman malicious elfin sort.

There was a delicate flush on her face, which showed not the slightest sign of the ordeal through which she had just passed nor the ensuing exhaustion thus produced. Her lips were scarlet, slightly parted to show the white double rim of her even little teeth. The neck of the blouse was so large that it was like a toga, slipped to one side to disclose an alabaster neck and throat of an impalpable texture. Beneath, a proud bosom gave the only token of emotion in its rapid rise and fall.

For several seconds Phineas stood there on the threshold in a sort of amazement, bewildered almost, forgetful of the weapon leveled at him, in a confused contemplation of her outrageous eerie beauty. She seemed like a perfect creature from some other world. If she had dissolved into thin air he would not have been astonished. His eyes fell rather stupidly to her bare little feet, rosy pink and delicately formed as those of a fay. If he had not so recently staggered under her mate-

rial weight Phineas would not have believed her to possess any at all. Despite the fullness of her exquisite form she gave the impression of ethereal substance.

Her cool mocking voice brought him back with startling abruptness, brought all his anger at the same time, augmented by a rush of some fierce foreign emotion. Yet not altogether this, for he had previously felt it, though vaguely and in a baffling, undetermined way. It was that perverse desire to seize and shake the malice from her. At least he thought it to be that.

"Well," said the mocking level voice, "now that you've had your look you had better go."

Phineas felt the blood pouring into his face. The tone, the insult, the very look of her was maddening. It seemed to him that his head was going to burst. The atmosphere of the room grew roseate, then crimson. In a word he saw red, though not with unadulterated rage.

"Shall we open the boxes?" His voice was thick. It seemed to him that someone else was speaking.

A malicious smile whipped up one corner of her wide mouth. "I shall open them when

you have put back the door—with yourself on the other side.”

“Then you had better shoot and put it back yourself. *J’y suis, j’y reste.*”

He did not move. His head was beginning to clear. For the first time he believed that she would carry out her threat; but for some reason he did not seem to care. She stared into his face and the telltale eyebrow quivered. Her mouth lost its mocking smile, grew straight and hard and firm.

“You are mad!” Her voice was sharp. “Go out! Do you want to die?”

“I don’t care.”

He took a step forward. The expression of her face underwent a startling change. The mockery gave way to a sort of exasperated ferocity. Her eyes opened to their full astounding size.

“You fool. What is the matter with you? I tell you to go out. My hand is getting tired. This pistol is apt to fire. Get out!”

“Shall we open those boxes?”

“Idiot! You can scarcely stand. You are white as a sheet. You have been drinking!”

“I have not! Shall we open those boxes?”

A sudden fury rushed into her face. Phineas

stepped forward. He expected each second to hear the deafening report, to feel the mortal pang. He welcomed it as the price he was prepared to pay for his obedience to an imperative impulse. He forgot the boxes, the pistol, everything but this mocking, tantalizing, infuriating, inhuman girl. She was not a mortal, had no legitimate place on the mortal plane. She belonged to some other, the fairy realm. It needed her bullet, perhaps, to open its doors for him. Perhaps when he was dead he would find her waiting for him there. Some consciousness told him that he had inhaled the poison, that there would be no peace left for him in his own befogging world. He took another step toward her, thrusting forward his chest, inviting his release. He was at that moment insane, as she had said.

The fury of her face froze into a look of livid hate. And then a startling thing occurred, and one for which Phineas was least prepared. The pistol went flying across the room. There was a flash of white arms, a swirl of ruddy hair and billowing pyjamas, and Phineas felt himself gripped by one elbow and the side of the neck. He knew the hold,

had practiced it in college, where in senior year he had taken wrestling lessons. To be seized violently thus awakened old memories, brought an instinctive muscular reaction, this assisted by the stab of pain as the girl's thumb sank in upon the nerve, the "funny bone," as it is called.

Yes, he knew the hold, and how to break it and recover; so as she whirled him backward with uncanny strength he pivoted on his heel and clinched her under the arms, clasping his hands just beneath her shoulder blades and bearing downward with his head against her chest. It was a back-breaking grip, but her lithe body twisted in his arms as though he had been trying to hold a revolving shaft. A bare arm slipped over his shoulder, a hand fastened on his wrist and began to tug it slowly upward with the deliberate strength of a low-gearred safe hoist, while the other hand stealing round him encircled the middle finger of his clasped hand and began to force it back—a jiu jitsu trick. Resisting, the finger would be broken; releasing his clasp, a dislocation of the other arm was the possible result.

Phineas realized that he had to do not only

with a feminine phenomenon of strength but a skilled and practised exponent of Oriental wrestling tricks. He was by no means ignorant of this school, and countered the attack in the proper technical way, with utter relaxation for the moment—a supple yielding followed by a swift offensive. Lean as he was they were nearly of equal weight, equal height, possibly equal strength, though of a different sort. That of Phineas was slower but enduring. The girl's was more that of a cat—swift high of innervation but incapable of sustained tension.

Such maneuvers as immediately followed in this curious combat were startling, bizarre; would have presented a spectacle to shock any but an athlete, but were far from that to the contestants. Phineas felt that he was struggling with a wrestler far more skilled than himself, trained to the last degree in scientific application on the levers and fulcrums by which the minimum force might achieve maximum results in the straining of ligaments and paralysis of muscle. And there was this difference of method—that whereas he was striving to overcome without injury to his antagonist the girl was fencing to disable.

They fell across the bed, pitched off onto the floor, Phineas underneath. He writhed over on his face and offered an opening for an elbow twist which was not neglected. There was an instant when he thought the joint would go, but he broke the hold by a head spin at the cost of infinite pain. For a moment or two his efforts were purely defensive, his object to save himself from disgraceful defeat. He felt that it would be more than that, a defeat to leave him helpless and crippled for a period of three or four hours. He had seen the state in which the jiu-jitsu wrestlers left their vanquished adversaries.

Then it seemed to him that she was tiring. Had he chosen to avail himself of tactics similar to hers he could have finished the bout at any moment, but manliness forbade. That and the passion to subdue her by sheer masculine strength, contemptuous of tricks. And presently his chance came in an honest half nelson by which he turned her supple body slowly, inexorably, until of a sudden its tense resistance relaxed, and from being a creature of steel springs imbedded in long round muscles he found her of a tender and in-

fantile softness which infused him with a sudden sense of shame.

Phineas raised himself on his elbow and stared into her burning eyes. Some mysterious change had happened there. They glowed like crucibles of molten gold but the fury had left them. It was as though they shared in the surrender, ungrudgingly admitted the defeat. An intense questioning lurked in their depths, and as they read the humiliation in his own they seemed to cool and soften, become human and with a hint of mirth. Phineas rose lightly to his feet, took her two wrists and raised her to her own. They stood for a moment looking at each other curiously, as if astonished at the violence of the past few moments and wondering if it had actually happened. Phineas drew a deep breath.

"Shall we open those little boxes?"

She threw back her head and laughed. "Why, yes of course!" she answered, and her accent was one of surprise.

"Who taught you jiu-jitsu?" Phineas asked.

"A woman professional in London. She had a little class. The others went in for it in a ladylike way but I took it up seriously be-

cause I thought that I might need it some day."

"Have you?"

"Once or twice—but never like this." She laughed.

"I should hope not." Phineas' face was rather pale. He frowned. "Where do you get your wonderful strength?"

"Heredity and training. I come by it honestly. It is not supernatural, as some people seem to think. My father was the strongest man I ever knew. He could tear horseshoes apart and bend five-franc pieces in his fingers and do such things as that. He trained me until his death, when I was seventeen; running and fencing and swimming."

"You said you couldn't swim."

Her wide smile whipped up. "That was because I wanted to tire you out. I swim like an otter. I wasn't the least done in when we crawled up the beach. Nor coming here. I let you carry me because I wanted you to be so exhausted that you would not want to bother about the boxes until I had opened them. Shall we open them now?"

"They can wait a bit. Let's first have

something to eat. Why were you so mean as not to want me to see what was in the boxes?"

"I was curious to see if I could bluff you out of it."

"Well, you saw didn't you?"

She nodded and looked at him with a curious light in her tawny eyes. "I never doubted for a moment that I could cripple you temporarily in the first clinch. Not seriously, of course, but enough to put you hors de combat for the moment."

"While you opened the boxes. Then you never intended to shoot me at all?"

"Of course not! I might have felt like it though if you had let yourself be bluffed. Then I saw a look in your eyes which made me think I had gone too far, and that I should have to choose between being bluffed myself or crippling you pretty badly. But I never had the slightest fear of the result. You are stronger than I thought—in quite a number of ways."

Phineas flushed. "I don't feel very proud," said he. "Perhaps I am not so strong as you think. But I can't understand why you should have wanted to put me through my paces—or let me think about you as I did."

She looked at him with a sort of indulgence in her slanting smile. "You might as well know. I wanted to have you work with me. But first I had to be sure that you were the man I needed. I did not want you if you could be bluffed by a woman, or downed or—or ——"

"Tempted? You did not seem to me like a woman. You seemed like some beautiful witch or fairy; and I am not sure but that you are."

"You must not say such things! The idea is absurd! I am as much of a mortal as you."

The color flooded her face as it had once before when Phineas had made a similar remark. He saw to his astonishment that she had taken it seriously and that it angered her. He could not understand why a sensible girl could object to being called a fairy, even supposing that there were such things.

But apparently she did, and so he dropped the subject. It seemed to him that every hour spent with this curious and fascinating personality changed his estimate, his opinion of her. She put him through a gamut of varied and kaleidoscopic emotions as a performing poodle might be made to exhibit its tricks.

Their outrageous tussle had left him cooled and shamed and with an aching elbow, but he could not see that this astonishing girl was in any way upset by it. For his part he was conscious of a new-found intimacy; a sense of ownership, of domination. At any rate he had satisfied the craving to seize her violently and shake the mocking malice out of her. And at the same time, perversely enough, he rather missed it.

But he was tired and hungry and for the moment desired peace and a comradely relation. He got up and began to overhaul the stores stacked up on the shelves, then suddenly turned to her.

"What is your first name?"

"Patricia. I inherited it from my mother's mother, who was the daughter of an Irish baronet and very beautiful."

"You inherited that too. I shall drop the 'Miss Melton.' Henceforth your first name for me. Somehow I feel as if I had the right."

"Because you are the first man who ever outwrestled me?"

"I prefer to base my claim on our having faced death together. It was touch and go

to-night. If the motor had stopped five minutes sooner we should have been done in. The tide would have set us off the beach. . . . What would you like to eat? Here are soups and sardines and pork and beans—and a little bit of everything, in fact. Let us hope the proprietor may not drop in to spoil the party."

"No danger of that."

Phineas turned to look at her as she sat close to the glowing stove. "Why not?"

"Because he is probably dead by this time."

"Indeed?"

"You appear to have discovered it yourself."

"I thought so. On what do you base your theory? Previous knowledge of this cabin?"

"No, but I suspected something of the sort. It was that." She pointed to what appeared to be a pair of onions hanging from a nail.

"Those onions? Why?"

"They are not onions. They are garlicks. Very few Americans eat garlic, but about all Frenchmen do. Not many greengrocers in this country even keep it."

"Then you think this is a French job?"

"Right here, yes. You see I am putting my

cards on the table. Do you mind showing yours?"

"Not now. I have the honor to accept your offer of partnership—with the understanding that my name is not yet to appear."

"Entendu."

Phineas stepped into his bedroom, picked up the clock and handed it to her. Up went the telltale eyebrow. She examined the time piece and nodded.

"That settles it. An antique French clock with a few bloodstains from the boche who looted it. Picked up on the battlefield by some soldier and sold for a couple of marks—or francs."

"Francs?"

"It's possible. Anything is possible. But I doubt if it was smuggled in. It would hardly be worth it. More probably it was gathered in with other such loot by this organization and shipped as a consignment of antique merchandise. They import a certain amount in the legitimate way to give an air of honesty to their shops. It would be interesting to know which this came from."

"I think I do. There are a lot just like it in the window of Durand Brothers."

"What?" Patricia looked up quickly.

"Yes. You know the place?"

"Of course. The two Durand brothers are under suspicion in Paris. I have discovered that as a matter of fact they are one man."

"The deuce you say!" Phineas looked extremely pleased. "I was just about to take a room next door when you abducted me."

"Really? You improve more and more on intimate acquaintance, my Phœbe. Yes, Paul Durand is known to his friends and neighbors as a highly respectable and patriotic bourgeois. Over there he has a pretty wife, two small children of three and five and is *bon papa*. He is rather portly, dresses in black, wears a close cropped mustache and Vandyke and plays dominoes after dinner over a *petit verre* in the corner café. Over there he has a pretty wife, two small children of three and five——"

"Hold on. You are making me admire the rascal. And——"

"—— is something of a sport, wears loud checks, is lean and muscular, smooth-shaven, plays the races and poker over several whisky-and-sodas. His neighbors regard him as a harmless rake."

"How does he do it?"

"He passes for his own brother, with whom he is not supposed to be on any social terms whatever. His name in America is Herbert Durand. His friends and families think that the two brothers have quarreled bitterly but continue their business relations because neither will give up his interest. Paul Durand spends six months in Paris and six months traveling in search of curios and gems at a bargain. Herbert does the same. The intervals recently have been trimestrial."

"I see. Papa Paul comes over here, gets a tight shave and a tight suit of shepherd's plaid, a red necktie and a blond overcoat, and blows in on wife and kiddies as having just returned from the road. Then when he feels the need of a change of wife and other surroundings he kisses the family good-by, fools round a little to give his fringe time to sprout, then runs down to some southern port and takes a slow ship for Marseilles. By that time his lip and chin ornaments are well along, so he bales himself up in a black redingore, gets a *chapeau de forme*, and is enthusiastically greeted by his pretty French wife and children. Gee, but that is some idea!"

"Particularly for a crook, because if one of him gets into a tight place he has only to disappear into the personality of the other."

"And still be in the bosom of his family, and a respected member of the community, with a business and a bank balance. Great!"

"He has been working it for about ten years. If he had kept out of this smuggling business he might have died of old age undiscovered. At least one of him might have done so, and the other fallen into a quicksand or something. But we think that he was at one time the fence for a swell mob of French thieves under the direction of a Pole. It was broken up three years before the war by an American ex-cracksman named Frank Clamart, whom they tried to double-cross. He killed their principal operator, a terrible man known as chu-chu le Tondeur."

Phineas looked startled. "I know Frank Clamart. He had the agency for an American car over on the Avenue de la Grande Armée."

"That's the man. There was also a very beautiful woman named Léontine, who was under the protection of a Russian prince. Her house was a rendezvous for the gang.

She disappeared when the mob was broken up."

"How did you get on to this cheerful bigamist?"

"That was my discovery. We crossed this last time on the same ship. He was Paul, the sober *père de famille*. I noticed that he had a slight tic, a little nervous contraction of the muscle round the right eye, which came from time to time. I got Madame d'Irancy to go with me to the store you spoke of and buy some beads. I waited outside in the taxi. She saw Herbert and told me that he had this tic. It is not likely that two brothers of entirely different habits would have the same little nervous affection."

"Then this must be his place!" Phineas exclaimed. "He was probably out in that boat to-night."

"Perhaps, but I rather doubt it. He's a man of soft habit and considerable wealth. People like that usually get somebody else to do the rough work. He's more apt to be in the bosom of his American family at this moment than drifting round out there. Do you think that the coast guard will discover our boat?"

Phineas nodded. "Yes. There's no ballast in her and she's got wood enough to float the motor. She will wash in with the high tide and they'll probably find her at the ebb. Then they will examine her license, which the law requires to be carried in plain sight framed under glass, and communicate with the owner."

Patricia reflected for a moment. "That need not give us away," said she. "I engaged her by letter and sent them a money order for her full value on deposit, so she was practically my boat. Nobody saw us start."

She stifled a yawn.

"Well," said Phineas, "let's have a bite to eat, then overhaul our find and get a couple of hours' sleep. We ought to clear out of this place without being seen if possible."

He replenished the stove and opened some cans of soup and beans and other foods. They were both desperately tired and sleepy but their supper refreshed them, and when they had finished eating they looked at each other and laughed.

"Now let's open these boxes," said Phineas.

Chapter XI

PATRICIA rested her elbows on the kitchen table, dropped her chin on her knuckles and stared at the heap of baubles which gleamed and sparkled in the lamplight.

Phineas dropped the last empty box on the floor, stamped upon it and fed it to the roaring stove. He stretched himself a little stiffly, rubbed his elbow, then picked up a slip of paper and examined it anew. This was the master list of all the articles contained in the boxes, each of which inclosed a separate inventory of its own. Opposite the items Patricia had noted the money values appraised by Phineas and herself.

"Twenty-one thousand, two hundred and forty dollars, at a conservative estimate," said Phineas, and gave a prodigious yawn. "If that represents their average week's duty-free importation by a single line they must do quite a business."

The collection was heterogeneous. There were finger rings, both men's and women's, none of any great value; gold watches and cigarette cases, bracelets; small bibelots, such

as might have been looted from the vitrines in the salons of wealthy bourgeois houses; antique snuffboxes and lorgnons; and even little pieces of rare porcelain, Satsuma and cloisonnée and carved ivory and the like. Each box contained but few articles, the object of their number being apparently to make a sort of trawl which would spread out over a considerable distance so that it could not be missed.

"It's rather disappointing as a haul," said Patricia, "but of value in proving what is going on and in furnishing a clew for investigations on the other side. Some of this stuff is certain to be identified, and that ought to lead to discoveries that may be of great importance."

"We've got enough now to bust up some of the business over here," said Phineas. "Let's take a nap."

"There's no busting up to be done until we've got a lot more than we have now. We are only dangling on the fringe of this thing, so far. All right, sleepy head. Run along and say your prayers and get in bed. I'll wake you as soon as it begins to get light. I wonder how far we are from anywhere."

"Not very. But you must get some sleep. You have had a wearing day. Especially the final wrestling event."

"I've had my rest."

"When, for heaven's sake?"

"While we were waiting for the ship. In these days of intensive everything one must learn to rest intensively. If you know how to relax properly you can do it anywhere—in a street car, on horseback, waiting for a train. learn to crowd hours of repose into a few minutes of utter relaxation."

"Perhaps you are right. At any rate you have certainly cultivated the other extreme, which is a terrific high tension. But if you are going to sit up, then so shall I. That might be better. Once I take the trail to dreamland it would need a stronger girl than you to haul me back; and that's saying something."

He drew a wicker armchair up to the stove and flung himself into it. Patricia gave him a smile and let her head sink against the back of her own. They were sitting vis-à-vis, she with her heavy hair still loosened and spread to dry. It hung straight to the floor, on which it seemed to swirl and ripple in the flickering

glare from the open door of the stove. Phineas had always thought of the expression "clothed in her flowing tresses" as a poetical figure of speech, but he reflected that Patricia might easily verify it. He had never supposed that women ever actually had hair of such quality and abundance. Its color also was unusual, neither golden nor cupric nor of any other metallic sheen, but warm and luminous of tone, and so fine that its shimmering edges were like ruddy fumes.

It struck him that everything about this girl was individual and apart. She was *sui generis*, of her own separate species; or if there was such a species it was not a sort of which he had any knowledge except from the fanciful imagery of fairy tales. He wondered why she resented being called a fairy. It required an admission of elfin origin to account for her. But Phineas knew that there actually existed rare phenomena of feminine physical strength as well as beauty, though he had never seen the two so outrageously combined.

Pretending to doze he examined her face, which was presented at an angle of three-quarters. Her eyes were closed, the long dark lashes penciling a pair of sweeping crescents.

Her small delicately chiseled nose with its concavity of bridge, and the crimson curving lips gave her features thus reposed a curiously infantile expression. She looked like a sleeping child endowed with *féerique* loveliness by a fairy godmother. Phineas found it difficult to believe that only an hour before it had required the full exertion of his considerable strength to overcome this soft and tender creature, to keep her from crippling him to a degree of helplessness.

Was it actually through strength of skill or had it been some sort of glamour? The thought of the desperate struggle, the violent physical contact—set his heart to pounding, nerves tingling, banished sleep. Whatever she might be, no matter what the metaphysical solution of her dynamic force, something told him that her result upon himself would be to render all other women insipid. It seemed to him that the essence of many was contained in this cosmic creature.

Then, as the night wore on, fatigue asserted itself and he fell asleep; to be awakened as it seemed to him almost immediately by a blast of icy air. He started up and saw Patricia looking out of the open door, through

which came the first faint glimmer of early dawn. She closed the door and turned to him with a smile.

"We had better be moving, *mon ami*. The storm is over. It's clear and cold."

Phineas sleepily agreed, and picking up his clothes, which had dried thoroughly, went into the bedroom and dressed. Patricia called him presently and he went out, to find her pouring out two cups of steaming coffee. They made a hurried breakfast, for the day was breaking rapidly and they wished to get away from the place unseen if possible. Phineas thought that it must be a desolate stretch of beach ten or twelve miles west of Fire Island Inlet; also that they would find a landing on the bay side.

He cut the closed end from a gunny sack and tied up the contraband in it. Then they set out between the sedge and snowcovered dunes for the back of the beach, for if there was a landing, as seemed most probable, there might be also some sort of craft in which to make their way to the mainland. This proved to be the case, for a short walk brought them to a creek, where they came upon a jetty and, tied up to it, one of the typical Great South

Bay duck boats—a long, low carvel-built double-ender of about a ten-inch draft, with half decks and centerboard with which to sail in open water.

But there was no open water here, this part of the bay being a maze of serpentine creeks writhing between patches of bare firm marsh a few inches above mean high water. The bayman seldom if ever rows his skiff, these shallow waters permitting of swifter and easier propulsion with the pole. A British punter would find himself at home. Standing with the pole enables one also to watch the depth of the water ahead, gives quicker control of the swiftly gliding boat, and is more convenient for shoving off when one gets aground.

This pole was in the boat, supporting a tarpaulin cover to keep out rain and snow. Phineas shook this out and stowed it forward, then slipped off his ulster and handed it to Patricia. Following his directions she drew it over her head and shoulders as a wind break, then snuggled down in the forward part of the boat, facing aft, for these craft have no seats.

"You'll freeze, *mon ami*."

"No fear, shoving against this nor'wester."

"Do you know the way?"

"Just as well as I did coming ashore last night. There's the smoke of a town about five miles across the marsh. The tide will not be full flood for a couple of hours, so we've plenty of time."

He cast off the painter and they started to thread the water labyrinth. The sun had not yet risen but the day was coming fast, with a clear sky between flying squadrons of clouds. The marshes had awakened, and from all about came the bugling notes of wild fowl which had enjoyed two years' immunity from sportsmen in quest of bigger and more dangerous game.

High above their heads a Y-shaped formation of geese was searching sheltered feeding ground, their trumpet cries falling faintly. A line of whistlers whirred past, and if Phineas had been at the Front he might have waited instinctively for them to strike and burst with violent reports. Hidden in a ditch at the left some black mallards were at play and splattered out with startled squawks. Vertical roseate rays shot up over the Long Island hills and a moment later a dazzling orange gleam swept the marshes like a wave of flame.

"I like this, my Phœbe!"

"So do I. Wish we could stop for a couple of days' sport."

"Perhaps we may come again—for bigger game than ducks."

"That's so. They may think that boat broke down and blew offshore and foundered. Well, you can pay for yours; and then some."

"My government pays. This stuff goes back in the French embassy pouch. This is quite a feather in my cap, *mon ami*, and I have you to thank for it."

"That's not what you thought last night."

"Yes, it is. I told you that I wanted to try you out."

"Well, you sure managed it. Some day when you are not so tired you might take me on again."

She looked at him with her teasing smile and the tantalizing gleam in her amber-colored eyes; and all at once Phineas found himself again the victim of her potent spell.

"Jamais de la vie, mon brave!"

"Jamais?" He leaned forward, the crimson sunrise in his face. It looked far from vapid at that moment. "Never again?"

She shrugged but did not answer. It was plain to Phineas that he had failed to shake all the malice out of her.

Chapter XII

PHINEAS and Miss Melton landed on the bank of a creek in the outskirts of a town, fastened the painter to a stake, rigged the tarpaulin tent and made their way to the railroad station. A New York train arriving presently they got aboard, reaching the city about half an hour later. Here they parted, Phineas going directly to his hotel.

Patricia was going to Washington for a day or two and Phineas had promised her not to breathe a word to anybody about their discovery and achievement, not even to Rosenthal. This he felt to be only fair as it had been the result of the girl's close work and she had financed it, while he was sufficiently paid for his assistance by getting information that otherwise he might never have obtained. But he considered his suspicions of Durand Brothers to be his own affair and decided to tell Karakoff as much about them as he had himself discovered, withholding what he had learned from Patricia. The dealer was the person who had engaged his services and under whose orders he was working. Phineas

wished him to know that he had not been idle, and he thought also that Karakoff might be able to give him some assistance.

He therefore called up Karakoff on the telephone to say that he would like to see him, and was asked to dine at the dealer's apartment that night. He then changed into an old blue-serge yachting suit, which was rather stained and wrinkled from being a long time packed away, removed the yacht-club insignia from his visored cap, and looking, thus dressed and with his tanned face and hands, the perfect type of a ship's junior officer, went round to the rooming house next door to Durand Brothers.

The landlord proved to be a slovenly man with a bleary eye and an alcoholic aura.

"Sure," said he in answer to Phineas' inquiry, "I can give ye a nice front room on the top floor fer a dollar a day. Seafarin' man?"

"Yes. I'm lookin' round for a billet."

"Uh-huh. Had the flu?"

"No. Got it in the house?"

"Say, I've had the house full of it, and I don't want no more. I 'bout made up my mind not to take no more lodgers that ain't

immunized. There's nobody had it in the room I can give you, but there's a young feller down with it in the room just below. He's goin' to the hospital to-morrow mornin' and then I'll disinfect everything with them formalin candles. I guess you don't run no more risk here than you would anywhere else. Besides, everybody that's apt to catch it has had it by this time. B'lieve me, mate, it's kep' me busy here!"

"As long as you disinfect thoroughly there ought not to be much danger," said Phineas. "Anyhow, I must be immunized, as a couple of weeks ago I was spending two or three hours a day with a friend that had a bad case, and it never touched me."

"Oh, you're all right then. It passed me up too. I was careful not to sit in no drafts and always kep' a little liquor circulatin' in my system. They can say what they like but whisky's a preventive, all right. Look how it kills off these here young women and fellers that never touch nothin'. When do you count on movin' in?"

"To-morrow morning."

"All right. Come right up and I'll show you your billet."

He led the way somewhat unsteadily up the dingy stairs to the top story. Stopping in front of a door in the rear of the house he unlocked it and motioned to a large dark closet about eight by ten feet in dimensions with a scuttle by which one had access to the roof. The ladder was lying against the wall with bedding hung over it.

"Here's where I fumigate. Them things has all been cooked. It's cost me a bunch o' kale in candles, but that's better'n havin' a sick lodger on my hands."

The front room was the full width of the house and as clean as might have been expected. Phineas engaged it therewith and paid a week's advance. It occurred to him that it might be worth while to cultivate acquaintance with his bibulous landlord a little later. Possibly over a friendly glass in the corner saloon some information might be obtained as to the business and personnel of Durand Brothers.

Chapter XIII

KARAKOFF welcomed Phineas that night in his usual gracious manner, and Olga infused her own greetings with a certain hidden warmth which may or may not have escaped the notice of her father. There was a clinging pressure in the clasp of her hand, that hard intense expression only to be seen in the eyes of a woman who is infatuated before she loves; and her fingers were cold.

Phineas though far from vain could not help recognizing the symptoms, and they disturbed him inwardly. He had no wish to become the object of an inconvenient passion, and something told him that whatever of this sort might develop in Olga's system was apt to prove rather more than inconvenient. The potentialities held by Patricia for this sort of excitement were quite enough, and Olga's bore such a relation to these as steam to electricity. as a choice Phineas preferred electrocution to being blown up. It was silent, painless and attended by no mutilation.

The simple dinner was delicious, as always at Karakoff's, and during its course no mention was made of their affair. They went

afterward into the salon and rather to Phineas' vexation, for he had hoped to get rid of Olga. Karakoff said:

"Well, captain, surely you haven't got anything by the tail already? Don't mind my daughter. She's one of us. In fact, I suspect her of working on her own hook."

"In that case I'd better get good and busy," Phineas answered, smiling. "Do you know anything about Durand Brothers, importers of antiques, Mr. Karakoff?"

The dealer had just raised his demi-tasse, which was brimming full. A drop or two of the coffee spilled on his shirt front. He set down the cup with a look of annoyance.

"You shouldn't put a meniscus on the rim of our cups, Olga. See what a mess I've made. That's what comes of priding oneself on a steady hand. Why, yes, I know the house you speak of, Captain. It's quite an old one and supplies principally the smaller dealers, though on several occasions I have picked up something there for my own shop."

"Do you know anything about the Durand brothers themselves?"

"Not much. They are American born, I believe, though of French parentage. As you

probably know, the name itself is like Smith or Jones here in America. It seems to me that I've heard some gossip about the brothers' having quarreled and their relations being purely commercial; in fact, I doubt if they still do business together, as the one here in New York, Herbert Durand, spends about half his time abroad. The other brother—Paul, I think his name is—has a shop in Paris."

"They might stand a little looking into," said Phineas. "Their window is chock-a-block with old and valuable French clocks and watches and the sort of stuff you see in the vitrine of wealthy French families."

Karakoff lighted a cigarette.

"Of course a good many such folk are pretty hard up just now, and might be raising a little cash on nonessential junk."

"Quite so," Phineas admitted. "But I've found a little French clock just like a lot of those in Durand Brothers' window; and it's got bloodstains on it."

Karakoff inhaled a lungful of smoke and let it eddy slowly from his mouth and nostrils.

"Where did you find that?"

"In my room. I have taken a room on the

top story front of the lodging house next door to Durands'."

Karakoff raised his black eyebrows and smiled. "Indeed? That can't be very luxurious. The Durands would be about the last people I would suspect in this connection. But a clock with bloodstains is certainly significant. What sort of a clock is it?"

Phineas described the timepiece minutely. In spite of Karakoff's casual manner the glow in his fine eyes showed that he was intensely interested.

"It's not much to go on," said he, "but still it is a clew of sorts. You intend to sleuth Durand a little?"

"Yes, sir. If I discover anything that seems to warrant it I may run across and overhaul his brother too." He proceeded to explain his plan of securing a billet as a Junior ship's officer. "My family have been clients of the French Line for years and years," said he, "and I know the agents very well. They might be willing to help me. Of course, I don't need to tell them my actual object. Meanwhile I shall try to find out what I can about Herbert Durand."

He glanced at Olga. Her light gray eyes

were fixed upon him with a singular intensity, and her face was quite pale.

"Well," said Karakoff after a moment's thought, "you've got to have something to start on, and it might as well be in this way as any other. Your plan is by no means a bad one. To tell the truth I've been wondering if you would manage to get any start at all. Go ahead then, by all means, and if I can learn anything in an indirect way I'll let you know. What is your address?"

Phineas jotted it down on a scrap of paper and handed it to Karakoff. At that minute a telephone bell tinkled faintly and a moment later the butler came to say that Mr. Karakoff was being called.

When her father had excused himself and gone out Olga leaned forward toward Phineas.

"I'm sorry now that I got you into this, my dear," said she.

"Why?" Phineas asked, not much startled at her form of address.

"It's going to be a lot more dangerous than I had thought. If anything happened to you I'd be broken-hearted."

"No more dangerous than the Front, and I

was broken-hearted myself at not getting there."

"That's different. Something that a man like you couldn't bear to miss. It had to be done. Oh, I do wish you would give it up, and—and do—something else."

Karakoff returned at this moment, an expression of annoyance on his handsome face.

"I say, captain, will you excuse me if I run out and leave you with Olga? Just had a phone to say that I'm wanted at a business meeting of a concern I'm interested in. Something came up to-day that has to be discussed immediately. Beastly bore."

"Of course. Go by all means, sir," Phineas answered with a sinking heart.

He felt that he would prefer to have a wild-animal trainer take him in to see his performing tigress, then excuse himself and leave him in the cage. He had faced one such feral creature the night before and was in no hurry to repeat the act. But there seemed to be no help for it.

Karakoff said good night and went out. Phineas drew a deep breath and braced himself for what might follow.

In all honesty the simile of the tigress could

not be applied to Olga. There was nothing stealthy about her offensive. It came as a direct and vigorous frontal attack unprecedented by any gas, though two streams of liquid fire poured from the light gray eyes, which were in such startling contrast to her dark hair and eyebrows.

In justice to the girl it should be stated that she sprang from an untempered stock, pure Finnish, though with a wide difference of social caste between her parents. Karakoff was indeed a noble, exiled from his country many years before. His wife had been of peasant origin, a dancer more distinguished for her beauty than her talent and—until Karakoff had married her—conventional behavior. He had found her in a Montmartre cabaret, married her with the impetuosity of his race, shortly after which they had gone to America, where Olga had been born.

The girl's mother had died of pneumonia before the child was old enough to be colored by her temperamental personality, but she had inherited it, combined with a good deal of her father's power of self-restraint. Karakoff had saved some remnants of a considerable fortune and become an independent

jewel broker of mysterious transactions which had taken him all over the world. Olga had always accompanied him, and thus her education had been fragmentary in its academic features and practically negative in its social, this latter picked up from chance acquaintances in hotels, aboard ships, in musical and other courses.

Thus talented, beautiful from babyhood and supposedly rich, she had been pampered and petted and variously entertained until her social perspective was merely a blur. Karakoff did not appear to notice it; or if he had he did not particularly care. He had announced his caste, thrown in his life with merchants and dealers of more or less repute, concentrated on acquiring a big fortune, enjoyed the exercise of his finished knowledge of jewels and art objects, which he turned to its full commercial value, lived the life of a Sybarite, but never for a moment lost sight of his ambition to acquire really great wealth. He desired this a good deal as the Oriental desires it, not for ostentatious display but in order to surround himself with an atmosphere of luxury and beauty which none but his intimates might ever see.

And he was working toward this end on a large and dangerous scale of speculation.

It is doubtful if in all her life Olga had ever really wanted anything in vain, but then she was still very young and had never been actually in love. Men had begun to pay her attention so early in her life that she had come to take it as a matter of course. She had been sentimentally inoculated at such frequent intervals that she was no longer susceptible. What she felt for Phineas was not sentiment. Neither was it love. It was a sudden and violent infatuation started by his prompt response to her appeal for protection and swiftly intensified by his cheerful thoroughbred personality.

Phineas had entirely a wrong idea about Olga. He thought that because she was so traveled and sophisticated she must be an experienced and dangerous coquette. As a matter of fact the utter lack of any instruction in personal conduct and behavior had left her in the position of one whose manners have never been taught but are merely copied. They were not ingrained. She might play the grand lady for a few moments, then forget and become in a twinkling the savage or the

child. She was, in fact, scarcely more than a temperamental child, and she regarded Phineas as the finished product of worldly experience. She was herself less worldly than any girl of his own set.

Finding herself now alone with this young man of her choice Olga lost her head. She did not know how to flirt. She was about as capable of flirting with Phineas as a keg of gunpowder is of flirting with a lighted match. Leaning even farther forward she laid her hand upon the back of his as it rested on the arm of the chair. "I got you into this thing, and now I shall not rest until I have got you out of it again."

"But I don't want to be got out, Miss Karakoff."

"Don't call me Miss Karakoff. Call me Olga. And I want to call you Phœbe, as your friends do. Why shouldn't I? You haven't any better friend than I am."

"Do, by all means! But why are you so set on my chucking my job? Have you heard of some scheme to scrag me? Have you?"

"Of course not! If I had I should tell you so."

"Then it's all nonsense."

"It is not nonsense! I don't want you to do this sort of work. If it were for the government—official service—it would be different. But being a private detective employed by a crowd of jewelers and having to live in dirty lodging houses and having to stand all night in dark area ways and sneak round after low-down smugglers is not a gentleman's job. You are too good for that sort of thing."

"Nobody else seems to see it that way. I don't myself. There's nothing else I can do. I've hunted high and low for some sort of a position, and got turned down everywhere, even by my old friends."

"Then try your new ones—this one."

"My dear girl, don't be foolish. That's precisely what I'm doing. You got me this job and I'm working for your father and I want to make good. Besides, if I succeed I shall be rendering service to the country, too."

"The government wouldn't thank you. It would say that you had no business to butt in; that you were a meddler. Oh, Phœbe, dear, I don't want you to do it!"

"But I've got to do it. I've taken it on. I like it."

"Do you like me?"

"Of course I do."

"Are you"—she caught her breath and Phineas looked nervously at the rim of her corsage, then glanced away—"in love with any girl?"

Phineas made a fatal mistake. Had he answered "Yes" it would have left open to him a route for orderly retreat. But he was very tired and a little confused, so he answered the truth.

"No. Even if I were I'd put it out of my head. What license has a man in my position got to be in love?"

"You don't need any license to be in love. And there's nothing to be ashamed of about it. Oh, Phœbe dear, what's the use of beating about the bush? I love you, and you must know it."

"I know nothing of the sort. Neither do you. You are an impulsive girl and just because I happened along in time to save you from a nasty mess, as any other decent fellow would have done, you've gone and lost your head. Be sensible, Olga. Anyhow, what if you did, and I felt the same? That wouldn't get us anywhere."

"But it would, Phœbe! And why shouldn't you, dear?" She held out her arms appealingly. "Can't you care a little bit?"

He took her hands in his and drew them down firmly to the carved panther heads of his chair. She wrenched free her hands, sprang to her feet, and stood for a moment staring at him with eyes which had a sightless, stricken look, as if she had been shot or stabbed. Then as Phineas rose she swayed toward him. There was no choice. He caught her in his arms and her own slipped round his neck. She clung to him for a moment with head bent forward, her hair against his cheek, then looked up, her face flushed, lips parted. Phineas kissed them. Any fool would have kissed them.

Olga slipped down a little in his clasp. Drawing her tighter Phineas felt a stab of pain in the elbow which Patricia had so maltreated twenty-four hours earlier. It cleared his head instantly and he felt a burst of laughter struggling to get out. This job of his apparently had an element of danger not on the prospectus. The bizarre element of the situation steadied him, made it perfectly

safe to Kiss Olga again, which he did with less ardor but more appreciation.

She felt the difference instantly, thrust herself away, stood for a moment staring at him with a frown, then dropped into her chair.

"You don't care one bit, do you?" said she.

"I have not the slightest intention of letting myself care. Be reasonable, Olga. Suppose I were to care a great deal? I couldn't ask you to marry me."

"Why not?" Her face clouded with anger and suspicion.

"Because I've got nothing to marry on."

"I have."

"That in itself would be enough to prevent. If I were to marry a rich girl I'd deliquesce, melt up, never do another stroke. It's my nature, and the way I was brought up."

Olgo dropped her chin on her knuckles and stared at him thoughtfully for a moment. She did not in the least resent Phineas' refusal to surrender. She liked him rather better for it. She accepted the situation not as a woman scorned but as a clever little girl who has been denied by an older person something which she wants, and sits down to study out

a stratagem for getting it. Olga knew that Phineas was not in love with her, but she was convinced that once married to her it would not take long to make him so.

"Listen, my dear," said she. "I have never been in love before, so I suppose I act foolishly. There is no reason at all why I should take it for granted that you cared for me. But at the same time if you are not in love with anybody else there is no reason why you should not marry me."

Phineas looked at her with astonishment. He was beginning to like her better. There was a sort of childish candor about her, an artless way of asking for what she wanted only to be found in a child or a savage. Phineas realized suddenly that she was precisely the opposite of the subtle complicated creature he had thought her. It was impossible to be either angry or embarrassed with her.

"There are two very good reasons, Olga," said he. "In the first place I don't want to marry at all—don't want to marry anybody. I'm not the marrying sort; prefer to be foot-loose and all that sort of thing. In the second your father is a hard-headed business man and would not hear of his daughter marrying a

man without a cent or prospects or business ability."

"He'd be glad to have me marry you, Phœbe. He likes you and the class you represent. Papa is a Russian nobleman."

"I know it. Rosenthal told me. I should think he would want you to marry some member of his own aristocracy."

"That's just what he does not. He says old aristocracies are rotten. He hates them. But there is another reason for my wanting you to marry me, and right away."

Phineas laughed. From Olga's naïve tone one might have thought she was begging some casual favor, that he take her to dinner or theatre or the like.

"What is it?" Phineas asked.

"To keep you from getting hurt or killed. From certain things that papa has let slip I know that this job of yours is more dangerous than he had expected. I think he wishes he had never got you into it. If you were his son-in-law he would insist on your giving it up."

"And supporting us both? *Merci!*"

"Of course not. You could go into business with him, unless you are too proud. He

told me that your knowledge of antique art objects was more than amateur. I'm sure you would like it, Phœbe dear—and we could be so happy!"

Her tone was wistful, pleading. Phineas was partly touched partly amused. He stepped to her side and laid his hand on hers. She leaned down and rested her cheek against it. He stroked her hair lightly with his other hand. A little ripple ran through her.

"Listen, little girl. You've given me a big surprise to-night. I had never thought of you as just a kid."

"I'm just your kid."

"You need a nurse. But we have got to forget all this for the present. I'm on the job to see it through. It's the only sort of stuff I'm any way fitted for, and I mean to make good. There's a lot of dirty business going on and I'm in the game to bust it if possible. My ante is on the table and I've drawn cards. I don't intend to drop out. Your father didn't give me any new dope about this Durand person. I had all that and more. It's going to take a lot of doing and I'll need all my wits and more. So if you really want to help me don't try to take my mind off the

cards. Now I must go. I've had only about an hour's sleep in the last twenty-four and am nearly all in. Good night."

Olga looked up, saw the lines of fatigue in his face, started to speak, then checked herself and offered him her lips. Phineas kissed her and went out.

Chapter XIV

PHINEAS went back to his hotel and slept the clock round. Much refreshed he dressed in his old yachting suit, with a khaki shirt and green necktie, then packed his two valises and locker trunk and sent the latter round to his new lodgings by an expressman, this more befitting his rôle of sailor-man in search of a billet than to arrive bag and baggage in a taxi.

When he got to the house a little later lugging his two valises, there was an ambulance before the door, and the landlord, whose name was Slater, greeted him with alcoholic cordiality.

"Scuse me a minute, cap," said he. "I gotta speed the partin' guest. Hope t'Gawd this'll finish the flu business in this here tavern. I put your trunk up in the room, so move right in and make yourself to home."

Phineas went up with his valises and was pleased to find the place not so bad. The room had been tidied, the bedding looked clean and sufficient, and the crisp air poured through the wide-opened windows. Despite his bibulous habits Slater appeared to possess

a certain seagoing neatness in his housekeeping. The reason for this was explained a few minutes later when the ambulance had clanged away and he came up for a little chat with his new lodger. He told Phineas that he had himself spent a number of years at sea as steward aboard various freighters, and confided that his trouble had been the necessity of stimulation against the sudden changes of clime at inclement seasons for a constitution shattered by yellow fever.

"It's pretty tough when you gotta keep the old engine turnin' over on rum, sir," said he.

"You bet! Especially when it's as bad and costs as much as it does now."

"Well, that part of it don't bother me none. I manage t'keep a little o' the pure stuff fer me and my guests. Good old sugar-cane rum. Maybe you'd like to try a sample?"

"I sure would. I don't grumble at the price of the stuff they saw off on us now, but the quality is another matter. Night before last I had a few drinks and somebody frisked my watch. A solid-gold turnip that belonged to my grandfather. Now I got to buy me an-

other just like it so my mother won't know it's gone."

"Say, why don't you try right next door? I see their winder's full of old watches."

"That might be a good idea. I noticed 'em too."

"Come on," said Slater. "I'll go with ye. I know them guys and they might take off somethin'. But first let's have a little drink."

He went out, to return a moment later with an unlabeled quart bottle and two glasses. They helped themselves liberally, and on tasting the liquor Phineas was surprised to find it all that his host had claimed; a mellow old white rum, such as is distilled in the West Indies from the expressed juice of sugar cane.

"I'd like to have a bottle of that if you've got any to spare, Mr. Slater."

"All right. I'll fill you a quart. I don't sell but a quart at a time and only to the folks in the house—on the q. t., o' course."

"Of course. Well, let's go see if I can find a watch like the one this slick guy took off me."

Slater agreed and then went out and into the spacious store of Durand Brothers. A

young man in shiny black clothes, whose face reminded Phineas of the typical Montmartre Apache, came forward with a nod of recognition.

"Bong joor, Jules," said Slater. *"Où est le patron?"*

Phineas had turned to examine the display of watches in a show case. He felt the clerk's eyes spraying him. His own quick but casual glance at the man's face had given him the visual picture of a caged rat which had been rubbing its nose against the wires, eyes brilliant, nostrils red and inflamed, rodent teeth yellow and worn.

"I call heem," said the clerk briefly, and went to the rear of the store, where there was a little office.

"That's a shifty-lookin' guy," said Slater. "Snowbird or I'm wrong."

"Cocaine?"

"Yes, or heroin or some o' them pokes. You can always spot 'em by their bright eyes and snuffin snouts. See anything there looks like what was eased offen you?"

"Not exactly, but near enough, I guess. This is a funny place for a shop like this.

Most of 'em are over on the Bowery and Pearl street."

"Oh, this fella don't do much retail business. He imports junk to supply them others over there. That's how you might pick up a bargain. Here comes the boss. He got back from Yurrop only about two weeks ago." He swung unsteadily round. "Mornin', Mr. Durand. Shake hands with Mr. Plunkett. He's stoppin' *chez moi* and he wants to buy a solid-gold repeater for about five dollars and sixty-three cents. I told him that as you and me was good neighbors he'd better try here."

Phineas had looked up from the show case, to see a dapper well-groomed man of medium height, whose square muscular figure was disguised and attenuated by a suit of the Ultra-Parisian fashion now in vogue on Broadway—narrow-shouldered, open-chested slim of waist and bell-skirted, with high skimpy trousers; probably the most contemptible and unbecoming costume ever invented for a male human being. The stuff was smooth and fine, in tint a sort of disappearing blue-gray a shade darker than the latest French uniform, and in this case both cut and color were of skilled

selection to give the wearer a juvenile, slender and sportive look.

This effect was emphasized by a high choker collar, plum-colored tie, mauve shirt and piqué waistcoat with red dots. His shoes were French, long and duck-billed; and he wore pearl-gray spats. Oddly enough his face went perfectly with this rakish get-up. It was smooth-shaven, muscular, ruddy, with square jaws and a pointed chin, the cheek bones very prominent. The eyes were small and close together; nose narrow, high of bridge—rather a beak, in fact; and the mouth straight, thin-lipped and precise.

Taken as a whole the man's physiognomy was precisely such as one pictures in thinking of a Spanish bull fighter, a famous matador.

He shook hands affably with Phineas. "I'm afraid we don't carry much of a five-sixty-three line, Mr. Slater," said he. "Here are some that range all the way from fifty to five hundred; but the fifty-dollar ones are like the German military machine—they need a new set of works."

"There's a dead ringer for the one I subscribed to the pickpockets' relief fund," Phineas observed, tapping the glass.

"Some legerdemain artist get your watch, Mr. Plunkett? That's too bad. Have you reported it to the police?"

"Nope. 'Beware of the bull' is my motto. It was an old French watch like these that I shed the other night. Belonged to my grandfather. He was a seafarin' man too. Used to carry California wine round the Horn to Bordeaux, get it bottled and sealed and labeled, and bring it back as French. There was always graft, I reckon. Wish I could get in on some of it. I need the money."

Durand did not look at him. He was examining the watch Phineas had indicated.

"Is this very much like the one you had swiped?"

"Like enough to fool my mother. She don't see very well. That's all I want it for. It would break her heart to know I'd lost it."

"Well, you can have this one for the value of the case if you like. The works are recent and no good. Any watchmaker can put in a new set for a few dollars. This was thrown in with a lot of others. It's marked fifty, but seeing as you are a guest of my friend and neighbor, Mr. Slater, I'll knock it down for thirty-five."

Phineas was quick to recognize this as an actual bargain. He doubted that the old watch could be bought for this price from a Paris dealer. He paid for it from a roll of bills, the rat-faced clerk, who had slipped noiselessly back, watching the transaction. Slater shook his head.

"Say, matey, don't flash that wad in any o' these here gin mills on the West Side."

"No fear," Phineas answered. "I did that once and woke up with a bunch on my bean. Well, good-by Mr. Durand. Much obliged, I'm sure."

Phineas went out of the store convinced that Durand played an important part in the new and illegal traffic which he had been engaged to investigate. Telling Slater that he might as well get started on his search for a billet he took a downtown car, got off at the next corner under pretense of having confused his direction, walked round the block crossed the street, and coming to a little restaurant diagonally across from Durand Brothers, went in.

As it was well after the lunching hour Phineas found the place nearly empty of customers, and took a table by the window. He ordered a small steak, thinking this would

take the longest time to cook. When after about twenty minutes it came he ate it with much relish and ordered another and thicker one, remarking to the waiter that shore food tasted good after a long voyage.

He was attacking a piece of lemon pie with cheerful relish, keeping always an eye on Durand's door, when he was startled at sight of Patricia coming down the street. It flashed through his mind that she must have returned from Washington that morning, and having something important to say to him had preferred for the look of the thing to call in the daytime rather than at night. Phineas called the waiter, paid his bill, and giving the man half a dollar told him to reserve his place for the same hour every day. And as he was doing this and keeping an eye on Patricia she paused in front of Durand's, glanced behind her and entered the store.

Phineas sat for a moment astonished. An ugly suspicion began rapidly to foment in his mind. It occurred to him that after all he knew practically nothing about this mysterious young woman beyond what she had told him. Evelyn Crosby and Rosenthal had not been able to tell him more than that she was

a clever journalist who professed to be working at propaganda. She might have lied to him about being an agent of the French Secret Service. She had not shown him any credentials. For all Phineas could prove she might be in the sinister business herself, the agent of some crowd of which Durand was a rival. Or if actually a French Secret Service agent perhaps she was a dishonest one, possibly a blackmailer.

These reflections were followed by a rush of others even more disturbing. Phineas realized that at no moment of their adventure had she told him any more than was essential to the step immediately ahead. What if she had chosen him to carry out her difficult and dangerous attempt not because she thought he was efficient but because she thought he was a fool—a fool who she had learned was familiar with boat handling and that part of the coast, and from whom she need have nothing to fear. No doubt she had sized him up as being susceptible to flattery, chivalrous, credulous, plucky enough when it came to a pinch, like most Americans of his class and traditions, but malleable metal which she could twist round her finger with a tissue of lies.

Phineas could feel the hot blood pouring up into his face. He reflected bitterly that perhaps she was right. Now that he began carefully to analyze the business he felt a growing disbelief that she ever had the slightest intention of letting him discover the contents of the boxes or telling him anything at all about Durand. So far as the boxes were concerned she had made a virtue of necessity, bamboozled him into believing that their ferocious struggle was a test of his strength and determination before accepting him as a confrere worthy to work with her.

And she had not volunteered any information about Durand until Phineas had expressed his belief that the clock had come from this dealer's shop.

Patricia had then executed a sudden *volte-face*, flattered him some more, taken him into her confidence, said that they were working together. Why? Because she wanted to keep informed as to his movements, know what he was up to and how much he was finding out. Phineas began to disbelieve that she had been to Washington at all or that she had turned over their haul; or, for that matter, that she intended to. He was getting more

and more pessimistic about her the longer she remained in Durand's store. But he was reluctant to condemn her entirely until he should see whether she meant to pay him a visit on leaving it.

But the minutes sped by and she did not leave it. Half an hour passed and still no sign of her. Phineas did not believe that she had gone out by a rear exit because his observations from the back window of his lodging house had shown the rear to be flanked by a solid row of dwelling houses. Behind Durand's store there was a small cemented court inclosed by a wall, but no alley or other communication.

Phineas beckoned to the waiter. "I made a date with a friend to pass by here on his way back aboard the ship," said he, "but he must have been kept. Nothin' for me to do but wait, I reckon."

"Sure. Wait as long as ye like, sir."

So Phineas continued to wait. An hour passed and Patricia did not appear. Phineas' suspicions gave way to anxiety; or to be more exact they were mingled with anxiety. He thought of Durand's sinister Spanish face and the vicious-looking Jules. What if Patricia

had walked into a dead-fall? What if she had gone there either for the purpose of blackmail or to extort a confession, and been nipped in the trap? Quickwitted she might be, and armed, and phenomenally strong and active, but Durand had impressed Phineas as a tiger of a man beneath his sleek exterior, and he had that ratty Apache of a clerk to lend a hand.

When an hour and a half had elapsed with still no sign of Patricia, Phineas became seriously alarmed. He could not determine how to act, what course to take. It was impossible to search the premises himself, and to call in the police would be to stall subsequent investigations. He had too much respect for Patricia's ready cleverness to think she would put herself in a position to be ensnared, yet it was possible. It seemed to Phineas that there were three probabilities: She might have met with foul play; she might have been made a prisoner; she might have gained access to the street beyond through the house in the rear.

This last supposition did not satisfy Phineas. Admitting that such a tiger as Durand would very likely have a back entrance to his lair there seemed no reason for Patricia to leave

by it unless she was his confederate, in which case she would have been most apt to enter by it. If she had met with foul play it was now too late to rescue her. But if she was being forcibly detained, then something had to be done about it.

Phineas believed this last supposition was the most probable. He doubted that Durand would dare to make away with the girl. He might want to gain time for his escape, to get back to Paris and assume his other personality, provided, of course, that he was in ignorance of this being known to the French police. Or perhaps his object was to detain the girl in an effort to get possession of the contraband, for which she might have tried to strike some bargain with him.

But whether Patricia was honest or not made slight difference to Phineas. As his conviction that she was a prisoner increased so did his determination to rescue her, alone if possible, otherwise through the police. He began to study ways and means. The store could not be forcibly entered from the street because there was a lamppost directly in front of the door, and there were undoubtedly burglar alarms. Such a place was sure to be well pro-

tected not only against thieves, but an unexpected raid by the police. The means of entry in the rear would certainly be barred and wired.

Remained the roof. This was about ten feet higher than that of Phineas' lodging house. Its scuttle would be securely fastened, probably wired also; but Phineas decided on this point of attack. He remembered the ladder he had seen in Slater's fumigation room. He could haul this up after him and so make his way to Durand's roof.

It was half past four o'clock. On the sidewalk under the window a newsboy was crying the evening papers. Phineas rose.

"Well, no use my waiting any longer," said he to the waiter, and went out and down the stoop. He beckoned to the newsboy, a youngster of about thirteen with the alert face of his class.

"Want to make ten dollars, kid?"

"Sure!" The boy gave him a keen skeptical look. "Say, what sorta bull you handin' me?"

"On the level. You may have to go without your supper."

"Jeese, I c'n pass up me chow fer ten bucks, mister."

Phineas slipped him a bill. "Here's five now, and you get five more at eight o'clock. I'll be over on the stoop of that lodgin' house next to Durand's store. I want you to keep your eye on the store and tell me who goes in or out. Get me?"

"Sure t'ing. Say, mister, is youse a bull?"

"No fear. I got a girl lives there and I want to know who she's keepin' company with besides myself. Don't let 'em get onto you, kid."

"I should worry. All right, mister."

Phineas took a paper and turned his steps eastward. Turning down the next block he caught a cross-town car and got off at Third Avenue. Walking downtown he soon came to a pawnshop, where he bought a pair of heavy sheet-iron shears, a crate opener—which is the same as a burglar's jimmy—and a pair of brass knuckles. At a hardware shop a little farther on he bought a brace with an extension bit, a screw driver and fine keyhole saw, also a bottle of sewing-machine oil.

Returning to his lodging house, which he approached from the west side, which was

that way from Durand's, he found his picket still selling papers a little farther down the street on the same side. The boy's keen eyes detected him before he whistled.

"Poiper, mister?" he ran to Phineas and offered him a sheet. "Dere ain't nobody been in or out," he whispered.

"All right. Stick on the job. I'll be going across the street for supper pretty soon."

Chapter XV

PHINEAS left the restaurant at ten minutes of eight. His little scout, who was crying a fresh batch of papers, followed him in a leisurely way down the street and approached as Phineas reached the corner.

"Dere's been four guys went in, mister. T'ree was kinder old, like. Two had a bunch o' spinach on dere mugs."

"And the fourth?"

"He was a young feller 'bout as old as you, and husky. De ot'er guys just stayed a few minutes and beat it. Dey looked like shopkeepers."

"Anybody else come out?"

"On'y de boss, Durand. He ain't come back. He lef' 'bout an hour later dan he does most times. He bought a poiper and give me de oncet over, but didn't crack nutt'n."

"What did the young man that went in look like? Ever see him before?"

"I t'ought I seen him go in 'bout a week ago, but I ain't sure. He looks like a Swede or a Goiman. I t'nk he's a sailor."

"No woman came out?"

"No, sir. None went in, needer."

"All right. Here's your fiver. Now keep your mouth shut and maybe I'll have another job for you before long."

"Sure t'ing!" cried the delighted boy. "Say, mister, you seagoin' guys is all right. T'anks."

Phineas returned to the lodging house, the front door of which was apparently never locked. On the dark stairway leading to the top floor he overtook Slater, who was struggling unsteadily upward under a heap of bedding.

"You're carryin' a good deck load, Mr. Slater."

"You've said it, matey!" panted his host. "'ain't all—deck load—neither." He reached the top, lurched to the door of the closet, toppled into it, then freed himself and straightened up, breathing heavily. "'Overloaded, undermanned, meant to founder, we——'" he quoted. "Shiver me timbers and strike me blind-o, but I'm born too long ago for this skylarkin'. Euchered God Almighty's storm and bluffed the 'tarnal flu! Booze in bulk in the lower hold and a deck load o' bugs!" He scuffled the thin mattress into a corner and hung the bedding from a line he had rigged.

"Now I'll light me little candles and gas the sons o' guns."

"I see you are a man of thorough methods," Phineas observed. "A doctor told me that flu bugs were easily killed away from their host."

"Like my lodgers. I don't believe him. Anyhow, I'm takin' no chances. It's my sea-goin' trainin'. I've fumigated for yaller fever and smallpox and bubonic plague and cholery, and I've got the fumigatin' habit. It gives me a sorta satisfaction to think of all them damned boche-hatched bugs breathin' their last in horrid agony. This here formalin has got sulphur stung to death, lashed to the mast, nailed to the counter. Now I gotta go to the drug store and buy them candles. Soon's I come back I'll fill ye that preventative."

"Don't bother about it to-night, Mr. Slater. I'm going right to bed. Haven't had much sleep lately and I got to catch up."

"All right. Jus' as you like."

Slater went down and Phineas entered his room, closed and locked the door, then put on his heavy ulster and cap, opened the window to its full width and sat down beside it in the dark for a vigil of Durand's door. He had an idea that some of the gang might

gather that night to discuss Patricia's case, and he wanted to see who went in or out.

It was a tedious job. Slater sailed out and stood away across the street quite steadily, but he may have believed in combining the ingredients of his prophylaxis with certain poisons to be had in the corner saloon, for it was a full two hours before he returned, tacking this time and making heavy weather of it. A few minutes later Phineas heard him bumping about in the fumigating room and hoped that he would manage without setting the house afire.

The slow hours dragged wearily past. Though he had slept late that morning the sheer monotony of his lookout made it almost painful to keep awake. He did not wish to start his raid before midnight lest it be interfered with by late arrivals. The time drew near and Phineas, deciding that Durand must intend to manage his affair alone, was about to get to work when there came a great bumping and banging from the fumigating room. This lasted but a minute or two and he thought that Slater must have got worried about the possibilities of a blaze and come up to look in and see that everything was all right.

Phineas waited about twenty minutes longer, then got up, slipped off his overcoat and prepared for action. He hung his automatic on his belt, pocketed his torch and took the packet of tools from the trunk. Stealing out into the hall he stood for a moment listening, then unlocked the door of the fumigating room and drew back to let the powerful corrosive fumes dissipate. The candles had gone out, but he caught a whiff of gas which stung his nasal passages and brought the tears to his eyes. At the end of a few minutes he went to the door and feeling no more gas flashed in his light, then sprang back, startled and horrified.

For the inanimate figure of a man lay sprawled across the bedding, and at the same instant he discovered what the door had prevented his seeing when he opened it, that the scuttle in the roof was open and the moonlight blazing straight down into the room.

Half sick with horror, for his first thought was that Slater must have stumbled drunkenly into the room, pulled the door shut after him and been immediately suffocated, Phineas was about to haul out the body when it struck him that Slater could not have opened the scuttle without the ladder. He flashed his light on

the face of the dead man, and with a shock of amazement recognized the ratty features of Jules, the clerk in Durand's.

Phineas thought he understood. He remembered Slater's caution about showing his money in that neighborhood, one of the toughest in the city. Jules had been watching him when he paid for the watch, must have seen the sheaf of bills of large denomination which had been drawn part way from his wallet when he peeled off the fifty-dollar note. The man had looked the typical Apache, and now he had played true to form. No doubt he had learned that Phineas was the only lodger on the top floor and determined to ease him of his money.

It had been a simple matter to drop down from the higher roof onto that of the lodging house, pry up the scuttle, which was held by a couple of simple hooks and screw eyes, and then, with no warning of the heavy and invisible fumes which filled the big closet, he had swung himself down and dropped, to be immediately stifled by the powerful corrosive gas. One breath of this would be enough to paralyze his respiration, spasmodically contract his trachea, close his epiglottis, arrest the whole machinery of breathing. He must have

been suffocated in very few minutes, a speedy end for an individual with heart and lungs already weakened by the cocaine habit or the use of heroin.

He was quite dead. Of that there could not be the slightest doubt. Phineas' brief examination proving this to his double satisfaction he stood for a moment pondering what to do with the corpse. He decided to leave it where it was. The motive of the clerk must be as obvious as his cause of death. And the beauty of the business was that it had made Phineas' task infinitely easier. Easier and much less dangerous. He would be spared the work and risk of being heard while forcing the scuttle hatch of Durand's loft. It seemed to Phineas that fortune was playing into his hands. He went back into his room and locked up his tools, keeping only the jimmy, a tool and weapon combined. Then going back to the fumigating room he raised the ladder to the scuttle and climbing onto the roof hauled the ladder after him. He saw that Jules had left a rope dangling from Durand's roof, but the ladder was easier.

The scuttle hatch of the Durand building had been replaced. Phineas raised it and peer-

ing into the blackness beneath flashed his light. He had expected to find a loft, a storeroom, but to his amazement the traveling beam passed from one to another detail of a large and luxuriously furnished room, what appeared to be a handsome salon with rich rugs, superb armchairs and tables and divans, while on the walls were splendid paintings and mirrors and tapestries, the appointments of a palace. This room was walled off from the front of the loft and Phineas saw that the windows were covered by heavy brocaded portières.

Directly under the hatch was a stepladder. Phineas lowered himself through the scuttle and closed it above him, sliding the four heavy bolts with which it fastened. He decided that it would be easier to leave the house by the front door, always provided that nothing happened to prevent his leaving it at all. Torch in hand he proceeded with a quick examination of the place. It appeared to be partly salon, partly bureau, such a bureau as a monarch might have in his palace. There was a big Empire center table, a magnificent piece on which were writing materials, a *secrétaire* in one corner and a large modern safe in another.

Completing his turn of the room Phineas

came to what appeared to be a closet, but on trying the door he discovered that it opened on a winding stairway. Then as he stood there listening, every sense alert, he heard the faint closing of a door, the front door, he thought, and immediately after that the murmur of voices. It grew more distinct. Some people were coming up. Phineas darted to the stepladder, folded it and slid it under a divan. There came the sound of footsteps on the stair. He slipped behind the portières that screened one of the windows and finding scant space mounted to the sill. Then the portières hung straight and undisturbed.

He was none too soon. The door at the head of the winding stairway swung open, there came a click and the room was flooded with light. Peering through the slit between the portières Phineas saw Durand standing on the threshold. There was a bandage across one of his eyes, a bruise over the other, and his tightly shaved face bore the scars of recent strife, some deep scratches and a swollen lip.

Thought Phineas to himself: "Patricia certainly carved her initials on that bigamist." He felt infinitely relieved. Durand's battered condition indicated that there had been a strug-

gle, and a struggle would indicate that the girl had been overpowered and made prisoner. No rough-and-tumble would have been required to kill her. She must have been captured and locked up, held as hostage or something of the sort. Nor did Phineas believe that she had suffered any indignity beyond the heavy handling necessary to put in restrain a person of her uncommon strength and skill. She might, however, be confronted by the threat of this.

Durand entered. Behind him came two middle-aged men in evening dress and overcoats, one sable-lined and the other having a *doublure* of fine astrakhan. They might have been of any nationality and were evidently strangers to the place, for they paused on the threshold with exclamations of surprise at its magnificence.

Then they entered and behind them came—Karakoff!

The jimmy slipped through Phineas' fingers, but fortunately the tool was long and his reflexes were not completely paralyzed, so that he gripped it by the end before it fell. As a matter of fact he nearly fell off the window sill himself at sight of his employer in that spider's parlor.

But he managed to holt taut and was given no time for vain speculation as Karakoff closed the door behind him and the quartet began a rapid conversation in French. Phineas had acquired the language as a child and later perfected it in Paris, but the two strangers chopped their words in a staccato way difficult to follow. They were men of medium size, one rather thick of build, swarthy, of olive complexion, thick black hair. They looked like brothers. The mustache of one was heavy and curled, the other close cropped. Their features were not Semitic, nor had they the pure French accent spoken by most Russians. Phineas thought they might be Greek.

"Very handsome," said one of them, glancing about the room. "*Une salle de muséo.*"

Karakoff shrugged and drew up two more heavy *fauteuils* to the table.

"Stock in trade. Not much market for this stuff just now. I store it here awaiting the appreciation of value which should come later. We might as well enjoy the use of it. This is our American headquarters, where I meet gentlemen like yourselves and discuss plans of campaign. Sit down, if you please." He seated himself at the head of the table, his

handsome profile to Phineas, drummed for a moment impatiently with his strong fingers, then looked at Durand with a frown. "Now what's all this about the Melton woman?"

"It's not my fault, monsieur." Durand's voice was surly but apologetic. "One can't drop several boxes out of ship's porthole without some risk of being discovered. Passengers have a habit of hanging over the rail. Everybody was at dinner and it was impossible to wait longer. She must have suspected something and been on watch. To anybody else it would have looked merely as though a passenger were throwing out trash, empty candy boxes and the like. These ships have cut down their table to such an extent that most travelers now carry a supply of relishes for the voyage."

Karakoff nodded. "I made a serious error in engaging Plunkett. You see, *mes amis*, I had a double motive. The big dealers who knew something of my past transactions as a buyer of gems were beginning to regard me with a certain doubt if not suspicion. I was conscious of this and desired to remove it from their minds by suggesting that we establish a secret service of our own. For another thing,

it occurred to me that by doing this I should be furnished with some gauge on the closeness of our operations."

"It was a good idea," said one of the strangers.

"The trouble lay in my selection of the agent, and I flattered myself that I could not have found a better one. It was necessary that he be an individual in whom the others would have absolute confidence, so far as his honesty was concerned. This young man is of good family and social connections. It was evident to all that he would be incapable of double-dealing. Rosenthal gave him his cachet. But I made my mistake in sizing him up for a fool."

"Pardon, monsieur," growled Durand, "but you made no mistake about that. He is a fool. Otherwise he would not have come into my store wearing a yacht owner's costume, made most evidently by a fashionable tailor, and tried to pass himself off as a ship's officer. The misfortune was that he should have got in touch with the Melton woman, the ring and all that business."

"Of course. That was an accident that could not be foreseen. She was clever enough

to realize immediately how useful he might be to her. No doubt she assayed him as I had, for an honest good-natured simpleton of romantic ideas, who would do what she required of him and ask no questions. But I have changed my mind about Plunkett. I no longer think that he is anybody's fool. He has got something behind that chappie face of his. When this happens it makes a man doubly dangerous."

"Perhaps you are right, monsieur," muttered Durand.

"There is no perhaps about it." Karakoff's usually pleasant voice was sharp, authoritative. "A young man who can take an open motor boat out to sea in a winter's gale and pick up an incoming ship and ride down another boat—— By the way, where is Jules?"

"I don't know what's become of the rascal," Durand growled. "Probably gone to get some of his infernal drug. I hope it kills him. But the question now is, What we are to with this girl?"

"How much do you think she knows?"

"It is impossible to tell—without the employment of measures to which you object,

monsieur. She knows that I crossed on her ship and that it was I who threw the boxes overboard. She is also aware of my double personality. Her cheek and daring are astonishing. Imagine her coming in this afternoon and offering me immunity, police protection, in exchange for detailed information about our organization!"

"Of course she was armed."

"Naturally. Her pistol was in her muff, and she kept her grip of it. But I was too quick for her. I knocked it out of her hand. She struck me in the eye and might then have escaped, but instead of that came at me like a leopardess. *Sapristi!* I was getting the worst of it when Jules slipped up and dealt her a blow on the head with his slingshot. It dazed her for merely an instant, but that was enough to enable us to bind and gag her. I could not understand. My own strength is a little unusual, but hers was inhuman. It was like battling with a wild beast, a she-ape or something of the sort.

"And I was puzzled that Jules' blow had failed to stun if not to kill her. But I quickly discovered the reason. Will you believe me, gentlemen, her hair was snugly bound on the

top of her head and so wonderfully abundant that it would need an iron bar to make much impression."

Karakoff rested his elbow on the table, dropped his chin on his fist and appeared to reflect. There was a dark frown on his aristocratic face. Durand waited a moment for him to speak, then as he remained silent turned to the two strangers and said: "Monsieur le Comte objects to radical measures, but it seems to me that I should be permitted to take them for my own protection. I cannot keep this girl a prisoner. It is probable that she has told Plunkett about me. He has taken a room in the lodging house next door and may at any moment refer the matter to the police, who would immediately search the premises. He is at this moment as dangerous to us as the girl herself. All of our records are in that safe, with many valuable jewels."

Phineas' heart boomed so violently that it seemed certain to be heard. His knees weakened and he was for a moment in a panic of fear lest he be seized by a momentary lapse of consciousness. The thought of Patricia's mortal danger steadied him, however. He tightened his grip of himself and set his teeth.

It was possible that in the next few minutes he might be required to turn this sumptuous room into a shambles.

Karakoff roused himself.

"You must destroy the records to-night," said he. "Burn them in your furnace. We shall have to make the best adjustment of our separate interests that we can. We are in an *impasse* and must take no chances that are not obligatory. I had better take the jewels and put them in my own safe for the present."

"But how about me, monsieur?" Durand's voice was whining, yet sullen.

"You will have to make a bargain with this girl; her liberty, her life for her silence. I see no other way. You shall be duly recompensed. You have reason to know that I have never deviated a fraction from my promise to a confrere."

"That is true, monsieur, but what good would that do me in jail? She would not keep her word, even if she were to give it, which, considering her viciousness, I doubt. She would play her bluff to the bitter end or I am no judge of women."

"I do not believe that she has proof enough to get you even indicted. She did not see you

throw the boxes overboard. Nobody saw you. The stuff that we have on display here in the house paid duty—that is, all we cannot carry away paid duty. Of course you might find yourself in some domestic difficulties.”

“Pouf! That is the least of my cares. My two families are merely for the sake of establishing my double identity. For the sake of sanctuary. I established them so that in the event of Paul’s being wanted by the police he might become Herbert, and the reverse. Now that the trick has been discovered my families can go to the devil.”

Karakoff’s face hardened.

“One might expect a little conjugal and paternal feeling even in a felon, *mon ami*, but disregarding that it seems to me that in any case your activities in our affair are over. You cannot hope to continue them with the eye of the police upon you. It would jeopardize us all. You had much better retire, retaining the interest which I can promise you.”

Even through the narrow slit between the portières, the width of a knife blade, Phineas was able to observe the effect of this speech on Durand. His unbandaged eye appeared to darken, to recede in its socket, which filled with

shadow. He moistened his thin lips with the tip of a pointed tongue, this blood-red and needing only to be forked in its suggestion of a viper's. His face paled so that the bony prominences grew more pronounced, their Spanish feature was emphasized and the recent scratches glowed in relief.

Karakoff was watching him with a sort of stern contempt, cold, haughty, aloof—the gentlemen, even though a criminal one, disgusted with the base clay with which he was obliged to treat, and not giving himself the trouble to mask his feelings. It was evident enough to Phineas, watching tensely, that Karakoff was master not only here but probably of the entire organization. It was perhaps the creature of his brain, this scabious sea spider with its maw in stricken Europe and its claws in every port.

Durand swallowed as though to moisten a dry throat. Smoldering rage perhaps had parched it. When he spoke it was in a croaking voice, which it was evident he made pains to render servile.

"Pardon, monsieur, but if you will permit me to say so, I have no wish whatever to retire on a pension, nor do I think it necessary for me to do so. It happens that I know

something about the Melton woman's methods. She invariably works alone—that is, so far as the police are concerned. They get nothing from her until she has made her case complete. It is true that she might requisition the services of some harmless fool like Plunkett, but it is doubtful if she has even told him more than was self-evident. If she were to be removed I doubt if the police would have any case against me at all."

"She is not to be removed," said Karakoff coldly, and Phineas felt as if an icy hand had been taken from his heart. The blood returned to it. He knew that if Karakoff had not vetoed Patricia's death sentence then Karakoff would never have left that room alive. Phineas would have killed him, but he would have killed him with regret. A criminal the man might be, and enriching himself ghoulishly by the bartered loot of the battlefield and the goods of murdered noncombatants, an established traffic since humanity began; but because he was so graceful and finished and so thoroughly the cool and fearless master of these and many other desperadoes Phineas would have felt reluctant to destroy him.

There was also Olga to be thought of.

An utter silence followed Karakoff's arbitrary words. He alone appeared unmoved by his autocratic ruling. The three others were pale. Durand's face reminded Phineas of a dead picador that he had once seen carried from the arena in Madrid. The point of his red tongue moistened again his thin cruel lips and he looked at a buffet on which were some filled decanters. Phineas surmised that this room was Karakoff's, his private bureau as head of the organization, and as such it was only for him to offer refreshment therein. No doubt the whole establishment was his or at any rate he was at present master there. Durand being a subordinate.

Karakoff broke the sinister silence. His voice was harsh and commanding. Phineas would never have expected it to contain such notes. It burst out with startling violence:

"I forbid assassination. If we are so clumsy that we cannot conduct our affair without, then we shall close it up. It was of my origination, it is of my direction, and it shall be managed according to the plans I first formulated. Such chance encounters as may occur in the course of operations are unavoidable, as always in running contraband.

"Murder in cold blood is quite a different matter, and one which I shall not countenance. Let that be understood, and think twice before attempting it."

He struck the table a violent blow with his fist. Here indeed was a different Karakoff.

Durand's deathly face became more animate. He rose and bowed.

"It shall be as Monsieur le Comte commands," said he.

"Very well. I shall hold you responsible for the lives of the Melton woman and this young man whose services I have engaged. I do not want him even injured. I have conceived a liking for him. He shall not be any further menace to us if I can help it. I shall pay him his year and his bonus out of my own pocket, and tell him that his services are no longer required, that I am in possession of all that I had wished to know. To my confreres I shall explain that I have taken this step because I have reason to think that his life is in serious danger. They can think what they like. That is strictly my own affair."

"Bien, Monsieur le Comte."

Karakoff rose to his feet, stepped to the safe, and twirling the combination for a

moment tugged the heavy door open. His back was turned to the others as if in contemptuous disregard for possible treachery. Phineas watching them intently saw the two strangers look at Durand with ferocious eagerness. Durand shook his head, almost imperceptibly. Phineas let his automatic slip back into the holster. Karakoff was filling the pockets of his fur-lined overcoat, which he had not removed, for the room was cold. He turned to the others.

"You will burn all these records to-night, Durand. Feed them into the furnace. If anybody is the loser by it it will be myself. Now I must go. Good night, gentlemen. Make what terms you can with Miss Melton, Durand, and set her at liberty as soon as possible."

"Bien, monsieur."

The three rose to their feet and bowed. Karakoff crossed the room to the door, opened it and went out, closing it behind him. The two strangers stared at Durand, their swarthy faces fiercely questioning. He shrugged and shook his head. Then he stepped to the buffet, picked up a decanter, siphon and some glasses and set them on the table.

"Let us drink, messieurs—since the *patron* is too proud to drink with us. No, it can't be done. For one thing the business would go to pieces without him, and for another he has left a sealed statement to be put in the hands of the police in case of his disappearance or his being found assassinated. If he fails to communicate with his daughter within a period of twenty-four hours she is to take it from the safe deposit and deliver it at the Central Office."

The thickset man nodded. "That ties our hands."

"Besides Karakoff is treasurer," said the other. "Our loss would be enormous."

Durand filled the glasses.

"*Santé!*"

"*A la votre!*"

They drank. Durand drained his glass and set it down with a scowl.

"It is true that I am in Karakoff's power," said he, "but that is not going to keep me from regulating my own affairs—from protecting myself."

"The girl?"

"Yes; and this young imbecile next door. Karakoff has given his orders, but in this

case I do not intend to obey them. If he makes a fuss I shall tell him that I found the girl dead in the closet. either from the effect of Jules' blow or possibly from suffocation, and that Jules had already settled his affair for Plunkett. The latter is probably the fact."

"What do you mean?"

"After we secured the girl this afternoon I told Jules that if he could get away with Plunkett, who was watching the store from the restaurant across the street, he would be the richer by what he had in his pocketbook and five hundred dollars from me. Jules understands such little jobs. He is a Montmartre *Apache de pure race* and has turned the trick more than once. He may have managed it by this time. I have not seen him since I came in."

"Karakoff will be furious."

"He has my permission. How can he prove that I am not telling him the truth? He does not think that I dare disobey him, and at any rate he will feel that at least it was not his fault." Durand filled his glass to the brim and drained the old cognac at a single draught. "Come now, as old friends who have pulled

off many a coup in the days of Chu-Chu and Léontine, am I not right?"

The thickset man nodded. "Absolutely. It is your skin or theirs. Karakoff is soft. Ivan was also soft, and paid for it with his life. Chu-Chu le Tondeur was right. He took no chances. He had no more scruples than a man-eating tiger. He would be living yet if it were not for another soft one."

"Frank Clamart. Yes, he had his soft streak too. But, then, he was a renegade. I am a disciple of Chu-Chu. *Allons, mes amis*—another drink, and then let us have a little sport."

He filled the glasses again. His guests exchanged a dubious glance.

"Sport?"

"*Mais oui*. I will fetch the girl and put her through some tricks." He tossed off the brandy. "You can hide behind the portières. She is a beauty. When you have given her a *coup d'œil*, looked her over, you may say good night—and leave the pretty *poule* to me."

Chapter XVI

DURAND was reacting to the potent spirits as such natures, cowardly but venomous, are apt to do. His murderous decision, arrived at in cold sobriety, needed the artificial stimulus to be carried out unshrinkingly, with flourishes.

No amount of strong drink would have given him the courage to defy Karakoff whom he held in cringing fear. But once having nerved himself to risk the master's wrath he required propping up for the accomplishment of the act itself. Durand had talked largely of Ivan's old mob which had held the capitals of Europe in terror for a number of years. But he had never been of it. He had been no more than one of its numerous fences, an avaricious and craven one held in scorn and contempt by those ruthless autocrats of the underworld.

His guests, too, had been merely its jackals, cunning profiteers of crime. Chu-Chu would welcome them in hell with flaming spittle, Ivan pass them in cold disgust on their journey through the empty places. They were of the worst which humanity has to protest—worse

than the pirate; the slaughtering, baby-killing Hun, who has at least in the turbid depths of his maudlin murderous soul a spark of loyalty to something, somewhere, a blood-stained, blood-shamed chimera called the Fatherland, murmured by his drunken lips in dying.

But such folk as these had no merit, mere saturate solutions of cruel and selfish desire, ergo poisonous even to itself. Durand was the worst. He now sprang up and jostled the others to their screened lodge for the spectacle prepared in his lurid fancy.

"Here, behind the portières, *mes amis*." They surged toward the window where Phineas was waiting, pistol drawn, a cold Nemesis, but impatient. "No—over there in the corner—*voilà*."

He glanced round the room, seemed satisfied with his *mise en scène*, and skipped across to the door in a jaunty way which had something monstrous about it.

"One minute, *mes braves*; I'll bring her up," he whispered and disappeared.

Phineas peered after him hungrily and tightened his grip on the jimmy. He was beginning to feel an affection for that octagonal bar of steel. The pistol for the others if need

be, but the jimmy seemed peculiarly adapted as a tool with which to pry Durand off into hell. A bullet was too clean.

It needed a butcher's knife for slaughtering swine, poison or a burglar's tool or such pathogenic microbe disinfectant as had rendered Jules innocuous.

And then the pot began to brew. In the next window embrasure Phineas could hear the two visitors scuffling and whispering. He thought it probable that they did not care greatly for Durand's proposed entertainment but had consented to assist, partly not to give offense, partly out of curiosity. Something was now apparently wrong, for he could hear them tugging at the window and cursing in some Levantine tongue. Then he caught the words, "*courant d'air*." So that was the difficulty. The window refused to close snugly and this tender potential assistant to the baiting of a helpless girl before her foul murder was complaining of a cold draft on the nape of his neck.

"It's nothing," muttered the other man in French. "*Eh bien*, if you are so frightened of influenza, then try the other window."

There came the padding of feet on the floor.

Phineas gripped the jimmy and held his breath. Four thick bejeweled fingers seized the edge of the portière at the level of his knee, for he was standing on the window sill. The portière was jerked aside. He stood exposed in the bright glare of the incandescent lights, straight, rigid, his steel bar shoulder high.

It is doubtful if the swarthy victim quite realized what killed him. The whistling intake of his startled breath was synchronous with the whistle of the jimmy as it fell on his black poll. There was the crunch of iron on bone, not loud, nor of pleasing sound like the honest thud of fist blow. The man appeared to diminish in pleats, like an extended accordion set down on end. Phineas and the occupant of the other window sill stepped down with the simultaneous precision of two comedians doing a brother act. For some reason the man did not cry out. Perhaps years of stealthy practice had broken him of the habit of crying out when startled, or his whistle may have clogged, or its steam been going in the reverse direction.

At any rate he stared at Phineas, though not for any appreciable length of time. Then one

hand started for a side pocket, got there and no farther. Phineas' silent bound had brought him within the extended arc of the jimmy's orbit. Down it came, breaking the raised arm as though it had been plaster and smashing the skull it sought to shelter. Another leaky accordion, thought Phineas.

Sounds from somewhere below reached his ear, not cries or curses but more sinister noises. Something was being dragged along; a body was being dragged along, up the stairs, the heels bumping on them. It was heavy work, required pauses for breath on the part of the dragger. No sound from the draggee. The girl was bound and gagged of course, Phineas reflected, and she was a tall and solid girl despite her deceptively *féerique* daintiness.

Phineas' immediate instinct was to save Durand more toil and trouble; to go meet him and render his further efforts unnecessary, to finish the satanic play then and there. But it flashed through his mind that more extended information might be forthcoming. Durand was of the sort to taunt a victim before administering the *coup de grâce*; to boast his cleverness, superior acumen, accretion of

wealth; and to demonstrate the folly of entering the lists in tourney with his master mind. He would desire to show off before his confreres, sneer at the bungling efforts of his adversary, then terrify and gloat.

There was a canapé between the two windows, not the divan under which he had shoved the high atelier stepladder but one similar. Phineas dragged the two corpses thither, thrust them out of sight, then stepped up on the window sill, their proscenium box when animate. Durand would glance in that direction while presenting his spectacle. Some slight sign of appreciation would be in order—an agitation of the portières, a sly rustle.

The complainer had been right. It was cold behind the curtains. The ill-fitting window let in a glacial knife-edged current of air which sliced at the nape of the neck. Phineas turned up his collar and shoved the hand welded to the jimmy into his pocket. The bumps and pantings were almost at the top of the stairs. Durand's back bulked through the door, then the head and shoulders of Patricia. Durand paused, dragged her in.

"Dilly, Dilly, come and be killed," quoted Phineas softly to himself. Up to that night

he had been the dilly-duck, but now the situation was reversed. Three silly dilly-ducks were dead, and the fourth wadding to follow them.

Durand's locomotion was astern, his arms extended, hands hooked under the girl's shoulders. Her wrists were tied behind her, ankles bound, and she was tightly gagged. Her body was limp and passive but she was not unconscious. Phineas caught the yellow gleam beneath her low lashes. Durand hauled her to an armchair facing the window and placed her in it. Phineas could see that her breath was coming in quick shallow gasps. He was terribly tempted to finish the infernal torment then and there.

But he held himself in check. He must hear what the man had to say. There might be revelations which the records in the open safe did not contain. Durand stepped behind his victim, slipped off the gag, looked toward the window and winked. Phineas stirred the portières almost imperceptibly. Durand seated himself at the table opposite Patricia, reached for the decanter of cognac and poured himself another drink. Placed thus his back was pre-

sented, though not squarely to the window where Phineas was ensconced.

He tossed off the cognac and a shudder went through him as he set down his glass.

"Well, here we are *ma petite*," said he in French. "This is my cozy *bureau de travail*, *temple d'amour*—or *chapelle expiatoire*, as the exigencies of the hour may demand. I must ask pardon for having delayed so charming a rendezvous. Official duties. I was obliged to issue some orders to my subordinates. May I offer you a *petit verre*?" He sloshed some cognac into a glass. His hand was unsteady, not from the spirits he had drunk, but from emotion; stage fright, perhaps.

Patricia shook her head.

"Pardon, but I insist," purred Durand. "You must be chilled and cramped. I have a good deal to say to you and I do not wish you to faint while I am talking. Drink, *mam'selle*, or I shall be obliged to use force."

He held the glass to her lips. She tightened them. Durand took a pen from the table and placed its point against her breast. Phineas tightened his grip on the jimmy. Patricia tilted back her head and drank. Durand resumed his seat.

"That is better, *chérie*. I see that we shall understand each other. Now I wish to ask you a few questions. To begin with, where are the articles that you and the late Captain Plunkett so cleverly garnered from the sea the other night?"

It seemed to Phineas as if the thin blade of icy air from the window crack was eddying about his heart. For Patricia smiled. It was that teasing smile he knew so well; the whipping up of the left corner of her lips. And Durand had said "the late Captain Plunkett. Was this anomalous girl as devoid of all warm human emotion as the devil who had set himself about her inquisition? Was it a smiling news to her to be told that he was dead?"

She straightened in her chair, seemed to ease her position a little, looked at Durand and answered in her limpid voice: "Those trifling objects are in the French embassy sack. If I had suspected you of doing such a meager little business I would not have bothered to go out and get them. It may be worth your time, but it certainly is not worth mine."

"And what would you consider worth your time, *miam'selle*?"

"A job running into six figures at least. I

should have expected something better from one who had watched the operations of Ivan's old mob, if only from a hole in the fence. But what can one expect of a person with your loose methods?"

"*Diable!* What is loose about them?"

"Everything, my good man. Sending one boat to pick up your trumpery instead of two—a speed launch to lead off possible rivals, and another to pick up your trinkets. Though cheap pawnbroker stuff it would still pay two boats. Then you employ an *apache* far gone in the drug habit to do your dirty work. You do not examine your loot to see that it is not blood-stained; and last of all you are alcoholic. Phaugh!"

"*Assez!*" Durand sprang to his feet, face crimson, veins swelling on his bony forehead. This was anything but the spectacle he had prepared for the guests whom he had desired to impress. "Shut your mouth, you yellow cat!"

"*Oh, là, là, là!* The good man is not even polite! But what is to be expected of such canaille? Chu-Chu was pretty bad when in a temper, but politeness never failed him." She tilted her head to one side and her tawny eyes

fastened him with a sort of disgusted curiosity. "What are you, anyhow? Spaniard? You look rather like an old Pyrenees muleteer who wonders if the *gabelous* will find the tobacco he has stuffed in La Grisetta's bells. From your manners one would say that you were boche—but all the boches that I have ever seen were better looking. I fear you must be a mongrel—Mexican, perhaps, with a cross of Chihuahua flea hound."

The portières stirred. It was only Phineas drawing his pistol, but Durand thought hotly that it was caused by the stifled amusement of his guests. No doubt his impulse was to leap upon her and with a blow across the face or a grip of her soft throat stop violently the flow of cool, contemptuous, biting and, what was worst of all, truthful words. He had dragged her up there as a target for his wit and sarcasm, to make display of his cleverness, later on his ruthlessness. And instead here she was, helpless but unafraid, holding him up to scorn, revealing him as stupid, paltry and a sot.

His face was filled with murder as he glared at her, but he stood fast. He meant that she should suffer more than blows before he had finished with her. There was no hurry,

nor was there any admiration to be roused in his audience by striking a woman bound and defenseless. Durand's strain of Spanish blood furnished him a certain sinister patience and cunning. It was in his mind, just as it was in that of Phineas, that Patricia, realizing what he held in store for her, wished to taunt him into a sudden act of fatal violence which would give her a swift release. No doubt she felt that the game was up, her hour struck, and being of proud and fearless nature asked no more than to die unsullied by this foul beast.

Durand smiled. "You do me injustice, mam'selle," he purred. "Your cleverness is not of the high order which I had supposed. None of your statements are correct, either about my methods or myself. The consignment you intercepted was but one of many constantly arriving. There were two boats. The one you rammed was the decoy. It sheered off to lead you a chase but as you did not follow it returned. The other was following at some distance astern and picked up the men you spilled into the sea. One can do no more than direct to the best of one's ability. I was not there in person."

"I believe you!" The limpid voice was

charged with contempt. "You would never direct in person any job that held an element of danger to your own yellow hide."

Durand waved his hand. "Others will tell you differently. However, we are discussing my methods. As for my man Jules, it is true that he is addicted to the use of cocaine, but so was that master mind of fiction, Sherlock Holmes. For a certain period the drug sharpens the wits, gives abnormal acuteness of mind. I am watching my man, and when I see that he is nearing the limits of this brief period he shall be removed by a toxic dose. This man is now almost at the end of his activities, as I mentioned to a confrere only to-night. I may point out that it is rather an advantage to have an underling who is known to be a drug habitué, because if it becomes advisable to dispose of him there are no awkward questions asked. A powder in his wine or coffee, *et voilà!* He has indulged in an overdose."

"That would be about the limit of your daring," Patricia murmured.

"No; again you wrong me. But first let us clear up the criticism of my methods. As to the matter of the blood stains I presume you refer to the little clock in the cabin on the

beach. That slight detail was purposeful. The timepiece in question was bought at the shop of a dealer whom I do not trust. It was planted there by one of my agents and bought by another. If this dealer should become a nuisance I have thus a check upon him."

Durand reseated himself facing her. "As for my personal habits, *ma petite*, there again you are unfair to me. When the day's work is over and one is safe and snug with a pretty playmate, why not a little relaxation? We cannot deny ourselves a little pleasure always. The game would not be worth the candle. There must be some relaxation."

Patricia straightened in her chair. Her eyes widened in their startling way. She stared over Durand's right shoulder at the door. He twisted quickly about to follow her gaze, head thrust forward, shoulders hunched. His hand slipped to the side pocket of his coat, seemed to grope there for something which it did not find. At the same moment Patricia's arms slid from behind her. Phineas caught the flash of metal in one of her hands. Durand heard the rustle, turned sharply, and looked into the muzzle of an automatic pistol, his own.

"Hands up, *mon ami!*" Patricia murmured.

Durand obeyed the order slowly. His jaw dropped, then closed with a snap.

"Dimitri! Stephano! *A moi!*"

Patricia laughed. "Are those names to conjure by? The charm does not appear to work." She wriggled her knees, scuffled with her feet, drew one of them through the loosened cords round her ankles. "You are more stupid than I could have hoped, *bon homme*. Our struggle downstairs taught you nothing. Did you think that a person of supple muscles like mine would stay long bound? Have you never watched the performances of Houdini? And the joke of it is I picked your pocket as you dragged me up the stairs."

Durand was waiting for something. Phineas, spellbound with astonishment and admiration, did not budge. It flashed through his mind that Patricia's attention must not be deflected for an instant. Durand was too close to her, directly in line. Phineas could not have fired without grave risk to the girl. To appear suddenly would startle her, give Durand the mortal fraction of a second to strike with knife or fist.

So for an instant the tableau vivant was

immobile. Then Phineas saw Patricia's teasing smile whip up the corner of her mouth and the end of the left eyebrow lift. Her pistol was leveled at the root of Durand's nose—the nasofrontal suture, to be precise—where the entering ball would pass at an upward angle, for his head was tilted slightly backward. The tendons rose slowly on Patricia's white wrist as she squeezed on butt and trigger. There came a sharp click—and that was all.

Durand lurched forward in his chair. Despite the lack of any report one would have said that he was shot. He would have said so himself, for he had not missed the contraction of the girl's hand, the committal to Avernus in her tawny eyes. He might have pitched head forward on the floor, played dead for a few moments like a trained dog, not purposely but reflexly, had it not been for the second click, and then a third. The second arrested him en route. The third rallied to him a realization that the pistol—his pistol, kept always loaded—had in some mysterious manner become empty.

Then he acted. The palm of his thick hand shot upward, the ball of it thudded against

the angle of the girl's jaw underneath—a soft padded blow but on a vulnerable spot. She slipped down into the chair, unconscious for many minutes to come. The pistol clattered to the floor. Durand whipped it up and turned.

“Dimitri! What sort of a joke is this?” A flame of rage swept through him. “Oh you wanted to see me killed!”

The portières were flung aside. A figure which was not that of Dimitri or Stephano stepped down from where these worthies should have been. It advanced upon Durand in a curious stately way, as though leading a parade. He gaped at it an instant then turned and scurried for the door. Nemesis overtook him as he was reaching for the knob.

Chapter XVII

PHINEAS turned and looked with dread at Patricia's limp form huddled in the big bergère. He had not been able to see precisely what had happened but thought that Durand had knifed her. This seemed to be the price of waiting to hear what Durand might say, his taunts and boastings.

But a swift examination failed to discover any wound. There was not so much as a bruise, for Durand had struck upward with the ball of his hand. His square bulk had been between Phineas and the girl. Her pulse and breathing were slow and shallow. Phineas thought she must have fainted at the shock of finding her weapon useless and Durand about to seize her. Even such astounding strength as hers must have its limits.

He gathered her in his arms and laid her on the divan. There seemed no immediate danger. Durand was dead and Jules was dead and the two visitors were dead. It was amazing, outrageous, but true. Each separate act of the drama had worked out with a sort of dovetailed destiny, its several performers walking up and offering their silly

necks to the scythe of the Reaper. "Dilly, Dilly, come and be killed."

Then it struck Phineas that even the present situation had its advantages. He did not wish Patricia to know of Karakoff's complicity; at any rate not yet. He must first decide what to do, what action he should take. It was rather perplexing to be hired by a man to ferret out a criminal system and then to find his employer to be at the head of it. Karakoff had issued his ukase that he and Patricia be spared, no matter at what risk or loss. Should he now turn and destroy the man?

Phineas glanced at the unconscious girl and his eye was caught by the rim of the long stepladder under the divan. He drew it out set it up under the scuttle, then went to the safe and drew out several small ledgers. Slipping off his belt he fastened these together, pocketed his pistol and some loose papers which he found in a drawer, then climbed the ladder, unbolted the scuttle hatch and made his way back to his own room. Jules was lying as he had left him, sprawled across a corner of a mattress in the fumigation closet. Phineas locked up the documents in his trunk, then returned to Patricia. The

weather had changed and the snow was falling in large moist flakes.

As he stepped to her side Patricia stirred, drew a long shuddering breath and opened her eyes. Phineas raised her hand and stroked it reassuringly.

"It's all right," said he. "There is no more danger." He stepped to the table, poured out a little cognac and held it to her lips. She took a swallow or two. "I got the brute just as you fainted—or a second later."

Her eyes rested for a moment on his face, then swept across the room to the crumpled figure of Durand, then back to Phineas with deep questioning. Seeing that her mind was clear again he explained briefly all that had happened, holding back only the identity of Karakoff.

"I did not faint," said Patricia. She raised her hand to the angle of the jaw. "He struck me there. I wonder how the pistol came to be unloaded? Why should he have had an empty pistol in his pocket?"

"If Jules could speak he might be able to answer that question. I have an idea that they may have had a row and that Jules intended to make a clean-up and beat it. After

his visit to me he may have planned to crack the safe and did not want to risk a bullet from Durand while working at it. He may have intended to kill and rob Durand before leaving. Perhaps he decided that the place was no longer safe with you here, and that he had better go while the going was good."

Patricia nodded. "What did this man look like who took the stuff from the safe?"

"Like a prosperous shopkeeper; middle aged, dark hair and mustache, Grecian features. These other two were Greeks."

"We must find that man, Phœbe."

"If I do I shan't denounce him."

"Nonsense!"

"I mean it. I shall merely warn him to quit. He gave strict orders that we were not to be hurt."

"Bosh! Sentiment has no place in an affair like this."

"It has for me."

"Well, we'll discuss that later. We'd better go." She sat up and raised her hands to her hair.

"See here, Patricia, I've thought it out. We had better go back over the roof. Then you can slip out of the lodging house. This

whole business will be laid to Jules' account. It is snowing and our tracks will soon be covered. I can leave this jimmy beside him and it will look as though he was trying to make his get-away through Slater's to avoid the chance of being seen going out of the store."

"But the empty safe?"

"There is nothing to prove that there was anything in the safe; in fact, as Durand dealt in antique furniture the place might be thought arranged merely for show purposes, a suggestion for a millionaire's private bureau at his home."

Patricia nodded. "That's possible; but Jules would have rifled these men. You must take their watches and money and jewelry and put them in his pockets. You had better give their papers to me."

"To you?"

"Yes. You might be searched."

Phineas nodded noncommittally and set about his repugnant task. Rather to his relief there proved to be no papers; not even passports. Patricia rose and steadying herself against the table watched his search. There were a few bills of small denomination, watches, rings and scarfpins. Phineas knotted

these up in a small table cover, then looked at Patricia.

"Your hat?"

"That's so. My head is still humming. It's in the closet where I was locked up. I'll get it."

He handed her his torch. She went down the stairs, presently to return with the fur toque. They climbed out of the place, crossed the roofs, on which the snow was falling fast and resting wetly. It was still dark but the day was not far distant. Dropping the ladder into the fumigating closet they descended. Phineas placed the bundle in Jules' pocket and put back the ladder as it had been. They stepped out into the upper hall, locked the closet door and stood for a moment listening. No sound came from below. Patricia took Phineas' hand and pressed it.

"You've saved my life and more to-night, Phœbe. I shall not forget. Meet me to-morrow in the café of the Lafayette at noon."

"All right," he whispered. "Good night."

She slipped silently down the stairs. Phineas went into his room and looking out the open window saw her flitting like a shadow down the deserted street. He undressed in the

dark, put on his pyjamas and got into bed. His thoughts were milling about confusedly. Patricia's suggestion that he might be examined by the police disturbed him. If a search of his effects were to be made the finding of the records in his trunk might result disastrously not only for Karakoff but for himself.

What proof had he that he was not Karakoff's confidential agent? The other dealers, honest merchants, would probably be skeptical. It seemed to Phineas that the case against Jules must appear so obvious that a harmless lodger like himself ought not to be disturbed or subject to more than a cursory questioning. But he could not be sure. His room was next the fumigating closet, and Slater's house and its patrons might not be any too reputable. Besides he might have left some trace of his own presence, finger prints or the like. He thought of the jimmy, which he had gripped so hard, and slipping out of bed went to the fumigating closet. He picked it up in a fold of Jules' coat, rubbed the part he had gripped, then squeezed the dead hand of the *apache* round it, impressing upon it the thumb and fingers.

Phineas began to feel as though he were himself a criminal, a murderer. There in

his trunk were not only the records but the tools, which he had not used. If a search were made how could he explain possession of them? But the records were the most vital the most dangerous, and suddenly it occurred to him, why not destroy them? Hiding place there was none. He did not wish to risk going out, and what could he do with them if he did? And he had no desire to ruin Karakoff. Though engaged in a bad and unlawful commerce the man himself was not so bad. There was also Olga, who would be left alone in the world, her life ruined, her future dubious if her father were to be sentenced to a long term.

Nobody would be stirring in that house for another two hours at least. Phineas pulled on slippers and gowns, opened his trunk and took out the records. He touched the meager radiator. It was fairly warm; there must be fire enough in the furnace. He thrust the tools into his pocket and stole out and down the stairs to the basement. The cellar stairs were not difficult to find. There was a good fire in the furnace of which the door was ajar. Phineas thrust the small ledgers and other papers into the bed of glowing coals,

closed the door and opened the dampers. Slater had been pretty drunk that night and would be forced to think that he had forgotten to regulate the furnace.

The tools Phineas tucked away in the crevice over an upper beam of the coal bin. Then he stole back to his room, got into bed, wished himself good luck and went to sleep. He was very tired and as he drowsed off he murmured: "Dilly, Dilly, come and be killed."

Chapter XVIII

A YELL in the hall roused Phineas from his beauty sleep. He had been subconsciously waiting for something of the sort and therefore was not startled at a pounding on his door and his landlord's voice, husky and tremulous with excitement and the aftermath of impure alcohol, imploring him to awake and come and look.

"Hey, cap, wake up! Jeese, come look what we caught!"

Phineas leaped up and opened the door. A warm draft swept up from below. The temperature of Slater's lodging house was at least fifteen degrees higher than it had been at any time that winter, thanks to Phineas' manipulation of the furnace about three hours earlier.

"What's the matter? House afire?"

"Say, she does seem sort o' stuffy." Slater's face looked like wet putty and he was all ashake, the shock of his discovery striking him at an unfeebled moment. But he was making a manful effort to hold himself in hand. "Look-a-herel" He took Phineas' elbow in a trembling hand and led him to the door of

the closet. The glare from the open scuttle struck down on the upturned face of the corpse like a limelight, giving it so horrid an aspect that Phineas himself was startled. His part was not difficult to play.

"Gee—whilliken! What's this? What's this?"

"It's that there clerk o' Durand's. That feller Jules. He piped that roll o'yourn and come in over the roof to git it. What'd I tell ye? 'Taint ever safe to flash no kale in this here neighborhood. He dropped in and the gas got him. Hell, matey, I feel sick."

Slater swayed, seemed about to fall. Phineas seized his shoulder and gave him a shake.

"Come now, brace up, Slater. What of it? He had it comin'."

"Tha'—that's right. If it hadn't been him it 'ud ha' been you."

"Sure. It's plain enough what happened. I thought yesterday he had all the earmarks of an *apache*. Chances are he was full of dope and the first whiff fixed him. Buck up, old man! It's none o' your funeral. Throw a stiff drink under your belt and then call the cop. I'll get dressed."

"Say, you're all right, matey. It sorta up-

set me like. They can't put anything on me, can they?"

"Of course not! You'll get the thanks of the court. Shows you to be a clean, sanitary landlord too. Brace up and carry on!"

Thus encouraged Slater obeyed. The police were quickly on the premises, when the condition of the jimmy was observed, which with the open scuttle led immediately to an inspection of the room in Durand's loft. The whole affair seemed absolutely obvious, its motive theft.

Such complications as presented themselves to the police in the peculiar features of Durand's establishment were not brought forward in connection with the presence of Jules' corpse in Slater's fumigating room, nor were the landlord and Phineas subjected to more than a brief examination. A supply of heroin was found on the person of the corpse and the doctors declared without hesitation that a habitué of the drug like Jules dropping into an eight-by-ten-foot closet filled with formaldehyde gas would be stifled, his respiration cut short by the first inhalation.

Phineas testified that he had heard a bumping about sometime in the night but thought

it was the landlord coming up to get some of the fumigated bedding. The authorities appeared pleased and grimly amused at the trap into which the *apache* had fallen, and the police surgeon complimented Slater on his sanitary precautions. No examination of Phineas' effects was so much as suggested. So far as Slater's house and its occupants were concerned there seemed not the slightest ground for suspicion. It was perfectly plain: Jules had come over the roofs—the snow was still falling and there were, of course, no tracks—dropped down into the gas chamber and been immediately stifled.

Under the influence of cane rum and the consciousness of virtue Slater's nervousness soon passed, giving way to pride in his quality of swift if unconscious instrumentality in the suppression of crime. Phineas felt infinitely relieved and there was a general expression of the sentiment that he had played in extraordinary luck. He thought so himself.

The inquest consumed all the forenoon, and a little after midday Phineas went out and telephoned to Patricia at the café that he would not be able to keep his appointment. She asked him to call after three at her apart-

ment on South Grove Street, and this he agreed to do.

It seemed to Phineas that it would look more natural than otherwise in view of what had happened for him to give up his room at Slater's, so he told the ex-steward that the affair had got on his nerves and that he proposed to return to the commercial hotel where he had been stopping previously. Slater said that he did not blame him, that he was all right, presented him with a quart bottle of smuggled rum and parted with him almost tearfully.

Quietly clad but in a troubled state of mind Phineas had his lunch, then turned his steps toward the quarter of the town where Patricia lived. He had a premonition that there was a duel of wits ahead, that she suspected him to be possessed of information which she would spare no pains to extract. He felt that he was about to undergo a cross-examination of the third degree.

Behind this lay the shadow of his prospective interview with Karakoff. Phineas could form no idea at all as to the probable result of this. He felt like a mariner about

to enter uncharted waters dangerously sown with reef and shoal.

Patricia's apartment proved to be in a small modernized building where the front door clicks open by reflex action on the brain above, thus obviating service by that prying French pest, the concierge. By this superior American invention one may carry to one's rooms almost anything that is portable—a dead body or a very live one—without fear and without reproach. Of course there is always the chance of colliding with a housemate—but then, there is an element of chance in everything.

Phineas pressed the magic button. "Open sesame," and the latch snicked. "Dilly, Dilly, come and be killed," murmured Phineas, and mounted one flight, as per serial order of the button he had pressed. A door opened, noiseless and without invocation.

But on entering all such suggestion vanished. The little apartment was fresh and dainty, and so was Patricia in a Parisian tailor skirt and blouse trimmed with Breton lace. She looked as if she had materialized that moment from some fashion illustrator's mental image of a chic and stylish type—a little over-

imagined, perhaps, as to skin and hair and eyes and things, but charmingly impossible.

"There is no such girl," said Phineas. "Was last night honest and truly?"

"My part of it was. I'm not at all sure about yours."

"Neither am I—so far. The official finding in my case was a politely veiled 'a fool for luck.'"

"I shall not deny the luck part of it, Phœbe, but you are very remote from the fool which your Phœbus Apollo face might indicate to the myopic. Sit here, facing the light, so that I may take a lesson in featural expression as a mask for emotion."

"You flatter me. The blankness is the true exponent of my top story."

"A pretty awful night, Phœbe."

"Precisely. That's just what convinces me that I really haven't any mind. It was a ghastly, fantastic night—and leaves me without any horror at all. I climb over the corpse of a man who has come to kill me, kill three others myself with a baby crowbar, and to-day feel as if it had never happened at all or if it has that it doesn't matter very much."

"Don't I matter?"

"Of course you do! That's the outrageous part of it. I must be lacking in appreciation, powers of absorption. Or else I've looked at so many *apache* movies and read such a lot about trench warfare that my mind is fed up on such stuff. Besides, that sort of thing has been in my thoughts ever since I started this game. I had got mentally adjusted to it, just as I was mentally prepared for fighting at the Front. That's the reason, I think. The Front moved over here to meet me. A case of Mohammed and the Mountain."

Patricia nodded.

"All of which argues a mentality of rich imagination rather than none at all, *mon ami*. A mind which is swiftly adaptable to the stress of circumstance. A lesser one would be numbed or horrified. It is the war soul of 1914-18. Countless numbers have it."

"You are very comforting. I was beginning to think that I must have either a blood-thirsty streak in me or else be solid hide to the backbone. Well, thank God, the rotten job is finished with! Yours as well as mine, I imagine."

"Finished? What do you mean, Phœbe? We have only begun. Just because one little nest is broken up ——"

"This was not a little nest. It was the American headquarters of the concern, and the general distributing depot. The man who left was its organizer and head. I got this from the conversation of the others after he had gone. He is not an out-and-out crook who would stop at nothing, but merely a buyer of war loot which he smuggled in and disposed of in this country. Beyond that there probably is no other system. It is a limited affair of his own promotion and he is sick of it and wishes to chuck it. It was plain enough from what he said that he had got in deeper than he intended, for he gave absolute orders that there must be no bloodshed, no matter what came of it. When he learns what has happened he will close up the affair."

"What makes you think that? It's preposterous."

"Nothing of the sort. It will be perfectly plain to him that it was the work of some secret-service agent or agents. This chief knows that he is only one jump ahead of arrest. They knew that you were getting very

warm and that I was working with you. By this time all the evidence will have been destroyed. He must be perfectly well aware of precisely what happened."

"But why should he not think that it was Jules who killed the others?"

"For a number of reasons. Really, Patricia, I'm afraid that your headpiece has not entirely recovered from its two violent jolts, which is not to be wondered at. In the first place, it is not the nature or method of the *apache* to make an open attack. In the second, he could not have got away with it. In the third he would not have left you alive in the house. And in the fourth, the chief left the safe wide open and obviously empty. Jules' motive was robbery, and he would have seen on entering the room that the valuables had been removed. Besides all this, why should he have wanted to chuck what must have been a very profitable job for a few dollars' worth of plunder and the certainty of capture?"

Particia dropped her chin on her knuckles and stared at the wall. Her face was expressionless, but Phineas could guess that she was bitterly disappointed.

Presently she asked: "Then you really believe that this is all the business amounts to?"

"Positive. If there had been any more to it or any rival concern the character of their conversation would have brought it out. Of course they must have their buying agencies on the other side, and these may try to reorganize. But for the present there will be nothing doing. The chief was about ready to quit anyhow. After what has happened he will take his warning and obliterate all possible evidence against him."

"And you mean to quit?"

"I certainly do. I am convinced that there is nothing more to do; that by this time all operations are called off. I've done all they hired me to do, and more."

"Do you mind telling me who 'they' may be?"

"Not in the least. You guessed right. My services were engaged by a crowd of the city's leading jewelers who suspected that something of the sort was going on. Rosenthal was with them. They wanted somebody like me, not a professional detective; and my name was suggested by a dealer at whose shop my family used to have an account—Karakoff,

Antiques—you know. I'd seen him a couple of days ago while job-hunting and asked if he didn't want to sign on a buyer. I've always been something of an amateur in that sort of junk. Well, he'd read all about my newspaper muckraking fiasco and been tickled by my sleuth work, so he suggested me for this stuff and they took me on."

"But your work is not finished, with this chief at liberty."

"Pardon, mam'selle, but it is. I was not engaged to make any arrests, but merely to find out what was going on, and how and by whom it was being run. It is a private investigation and none of my business what my employers see fit to do about the information I may give them."

"But you don't know who this chief is."

"Some of them are pretty sure to recognize him from my description. He sat with his profile presented to me and I have always had a knack for caricature. I could do a study of his mug that would look more like him than he looks like himself."

Patricia leaned forward, her face eager, eyes glowing like the molten metal in the

bottom of the goldsmith's crucible. "Oh Phœbe, dear, will you do one for me?"

Phineas smiled and shook his head. "Sorry," said he, "but that wouldn't do at all. This information belongs to my employers. I've got no right to give it away. It's for them to do as they like about it. They may want to handle this bird themselves. For all I know he may be the son of one of them."

If Patricia had been suddenly transformed into a *loup-garou*, a werewolf, Phineas could not have been more startled. For the fraction of a second as their eyes met he felt his mind in a panic. The dénouement of this girl's inner nature was instantaneously revealed as a flash of lightning might show the unsuspecting hunter a tigress about to spring in front of him.

In that second he thought that he understood her. She was pure huntress, the materialized Spirit of Police, an incarnation of the soul of Javert and his cult. To her nothing else mattered—love or passion, riches or high estate. Her entire entity was ernicellular, single motived, her whole existence possessed by an elemental objective like that of the alchemist or yogi; in her case the man hunt, the

pursuit and capture of the enemy to the state.

Wherefore Phineas thought he could appreciate the fury of exasperation that now blazed within her. She had set herself to the unraveling of this tangled trail, picking up a bight of it here, a loose end there. Astute, patient, fearless, prepared for any risk or sacrifice to gain her end, now, with her quarry almost in sight, it had fallen into the net of a blunderer whom she had thought to use as a passive tool.

It did not matter one iota to Patricia that Phineas had furthered her efforts with skill and courage, saved her life at grave risk to his own, even while knowing that she had tricked and lied to him. She considered only the ultimate result, and this now drove her nearly mad. She believed what he had just told her to be true. So far as this organization was concerned all operations were no doubt at an end, its records destroyed, its head at liberty and to be dealt with according to the findings and ability of a group of merchants who had no affiliations with the police.

In fury and despair she felt the trail to be obliterated. Her instinct and experience told her that such a criminal affair could be run

down only while it was in active function. Finished, there seemed nothing to which she could fasten. Even if she knew the identity of its head there might be no means of securing his conviction. But as matters stood she had not so much as the knowledge of this man's personality. She could give her chief of service no satisfactory assurance that his activities were indeed at an end. Last night's work had ruined everything. •

And this complacent young man with the drawling voice and vapid face of a club lounge had it all. Patricia believed him when he said that with a few strokes of pen or pencil he could produce a character sketch that would furnish instant recognition. She knew that anybody possessed of such a knack had this ability. A fairly clever caricature with facial peculiarities emphasized is far easier of identification with the original than a photograph, often than a serious study.

But Phineas refused to give her this key, and he could guess at her exasperation. She could not pick the pockets of his mind and she had already run against the wall of his obstinacy. She must appreciate that his refusal was conclusive and be all the more infuriated

because she felt that it would have cost him nothing to comply; that he was merely paying her back in her own greedy tender of exchange—nothing.

It seemed to Phineas that Patricia found this so maddening as to lose for the moment all control of her expression, but he failed to see the danger that might result from this last thing which she would have desired. The reason was this, that Patricia, masked and mistress of whatever emotion she might feel, repelled him, froze him up, whereas Patricia in the full flame of her temperamental qualities produced an entirely different reaction. She roused him. So that now, as she glared at him in an impotent fury of rage at what she apparently considered to be his stupid and selfish refusal to give her what she wanted, Phineas suddenly found himself in the grip of an irresistible desire again to dominate her.

As he saw it there was something unwarrantably insulting in the savage hate with which she eyed him, the venomous hostility which he could feel her projecting, as though she would have asked nothing better than to wring out his information on the rack or by means of slow fire. It roused in him the

same passion which it had in the cabin just before their furious struggle, and during it. But now it was even stronger because charged above the bursting point with resentment at her ingratitude for his rescue of her when at the mercy of Durand.

The blood surged up into his head. He leaned forward and caught her by the wrists with no gentleness.

"Stop that!" he growled. "Don't you dare look at me as if you would like to murder me! Haven't you any human instincts? Any sense of decent feeling? Don't you think you owe me something?" And then Phineas left Patricia's apartment and turned his steps cross-town.

Chapter XIX

IT is often difficult to estimate the price of victory, but Phineas was comforted by the thought that whatever this might have been or to whom awarded he had not divulged a word that would lead to any suspicion of Karakoff.

The entirely different character of the girl's attack had not altered Phineas' attitude of mind toward her. He still felt that indescribable alien sense, as though they were of different cosmic schemes, and he did not believe that any degree of intimacy would be able to alter this. One thing was certain, that he was safe from the peculiar spell which she had possessed for him. And he felt that she must be conscious herself of this and that henceforth she would leave him undisturbed. But as he walked away he could not help but wonder what she would have done to him if she had known that he had burned the records in Slater's furnace.

Phineas returned to his hotel and there found a note from Karakoff asking him to call that evening at ten. It occurred to him that the dealer after reading the account of the

crime and singular nemesis which had overtaken the supposed criminal must be anything but easy in his mind about the records. It seemed probable, however, that Karakoff had guessed pretty closely to the truth but might have thought that Phineas roused by Jules' dying struggles had managed to enter from the street after his departure, when he had liberated the girl and killed the three men while in their cups. In this case he would reason that Phineas must have the records but possibly these might not be incriminating except through an explanation extorted from one of the gang.

It was therefore in the expectation of giving a lively shock to the man who had promised him a fifty-thousand-dollar bonus for unmasking him that Phineas arrived at the dealer's apartment on the appointed hour. Karakoff greeted him in his usual quiet, cordial manner and led him into his private reading room. Olga was not in evidence. Karakoff mentioned that she had gone to the theatre with some friends.

"Well, captain," said he as they seated themselves, "it appears that you have had a mighty narrow escape."

"I am not the only one, Mr. Karakoff. If I had not heard you give positive orders that neither Miss Melton nor I was to be in any way injured you would never have left that room alive."

Karakoff did not move a muscle, even to the flicker of an eyelash. He stared at Phineas steadily for a moment, then smiled. It was not a sinister, a disagreeable smile. His handsome face showed actual amusement. "So you were on the stairs?"

"Behind the portières. I back-tracked Jules over the roofs."

"I see. And bolted the scuttle after you. Upon my word, you are a continual source of fresh surprise! Not one man in ten would have bolted the scuttle. Still, in that case you really cannot call my escape a narrow one, because I would have killed that swine Durand myself if I had suspected for a moment that he would dare disobey."

"I believe you," Phineas answered. "It was plain enough to me that your scheme did not go beyond evading the customs, and you felt that if the business could not be managed without bloodshed you would have nothing more to do with it."

Karakoff's face lightened. "You are very generous, captain. I am not trying to let myself out when I say that I decided on my way home to chuck the whole rotten business. I started it in a moment of bitter resentment at the loss of a Russian estate which I or Olga should have inherited one day, and which I felt would have been saved us if the governments of this country and the Allies had done their duty by Russia. My country was a great well-meaning, helpless child, tricked and bewildered, good of intention but confused and needing only a strong and friendly pressure to find itself. The stupid giant wanted to do what was right. America knew it, the Allies knew it. Germany knew it—and was quick to act on it."

Phineas nodded. "I thought it might be something of that sort," said he. "Aside from that, your orders to Durand were enough to lead me to cover your tracks."

Karakoff stared at him fixedly. "In what way?"

"By destroying your records."

"What! Captain, did you really do that?"

"I burned them all, letters and everything, in Slater's furnace."

"You—you ——" Karakoff's iron self-control appeared to slip a cog or two. He grew rather white and a rime of sweat appeared on his forehead. "And the girl—Miss Melton?"

"She knows absolutely nothing of your connection with the affair. I have had an interesting afternoon convincing her that she might as well quit."

Not until then did Phineas realize the terrific strain the man must have been under. Karakoff looked for a moment as if he were going to collapse; then he rallied himself. The tears came into his eyes.

"Listen to me, captain. I swear to you right here and now that every cent of which I have defrauded the Government shall be repaid. That is the least of my atonement. As I have said, I started this illicit commerce in anger and resentment, never guessing for an instant what it was bound to develop. I began to regret it too late. I could not see any way out of it without measures which I did not desire to employ—the measures which I imagine you were driven to last night."

"Perhaps I had better tell you the story from the start," said Phineas, and did so.

Karakoff listened with glowing eyes. When Phineas had finished he sat for some moments in utter silence.

Then he said: "I have been an avaricious man, captain, and have not always kept within the limits of the law. But I have never done anything like this before. I did not need to do it. I am already twice a millionaire, and this business which I have taken over is profitable enough for anybody. It was sheer cussedness on my part to start this infernal scheme; to profit by the filthy deeds of a bestial soldiery and defraud a Government which has afforded me protection for the last twenty years. I must have been crazy. I allowed myself to be carried away by an angry impulse."

"Can you get clear now?"

"Yes. Durand was the only one I had to fear. He had the power to ruin me, but could not have managed it without ruining himself. He had a double identity."

"So Miss Melton told me."

"Durand was doubly useful because he could operate both here and on the other side. He knew the ropes, had been a fence of thieves, and was such a cringing coward that

one felt pretty sure of his obedience. I must say, though, that when I was taking the plunder from the safe I thought my chances of getting a bullet in the back were rather more than fifty-fifty."

"The others tried to make him shoot," Phineas said. "Why did you leave the records?"

"They involved Durand even more than myself. He would have burned them. It would have been a bit awkward for me. Besides, if I had taken them it might have precipitated things then and there, and I was not yet ready."

"Do you think there is any other organization like this of yours, Mr. Karakoff?"

"No. It would be better if there were, because an organization has always a loose end to follow up. There is no doubt a lot of individual smuggling. Those two men last night were independent buyers and smugglers who sold to me through Durand. Formerly they were hotel and villa thieves who worked principally along the Riviera. Old clients of Durand. They were the two who threw the boxes overboard."

"Was that house in South Brooklyn one of your depots?" Phineas asked.

"Yes. But that was not known even by those running it. They thought it to be a side line of Durand's. One of their scouts followed you and Olga here. That was the man who tried to get you a couple of nights later in Madison Square. I knew nothing about it until later, and then I gave Durand orders to see that you were not molested. He was very much opposed to my scheme of taking you on as a sort of gauge on our work and to bluff the other dealers. He had you shadowed by Jules, and it was Jules who followed you and Miss Melton to Long Island City and saw you start on the road for Babylon. Of course he guessed what you were up to, but it was then too late to warn Durand's boat. The two men in her must have been drowned, as nothing has been heard of them. So you see, captain, you have made a pretty clean sweep."

"Dilly, Dilly, come and be killed," Phineas murmured.

"Precisely. But Durand picked you for the Dilly. He did not know about the girl until Jules saw you leave with her in the car."

"Does Olga know anything about your part in this affair, Mr. Karakoff."

"No. It would break my heart if she were to find it out. She learned about that South Brooklyn fence from an acquaintance, the daughter of a sort of society pawnbroker, a man who lends large sums to the fashionable and demimondaine set on their jewels and furs and things. These two silly girls thought it would be a lark to slip over there and buy some trinkets, but at the last moment the other lost her nerve and Olga went alone."

Karakoff appeared to reflect for a moment. "A most singular train of circumstances, captain, and one which proves the terrible results so easily to follow any infraction of a country's law. Examples are not lacking, God knows, and yet some of us persist in making fools of ourselves. One reads of a bootlegger who shoots two excise officers and is himself killed over a pint of whisky. A young man loses his head over a girl and goes to jail for six months because he takes her ten miles in a train from one state into another. His future career is ruined. A rich and previously reputable dealer is angry because he loses an estate through international politics.

He determines to reimburse himself by smuggling and gets let in for an affair which might easily have cost the lives of two estimable young people and his own liberty. I do not know why I should have saved my skin so undeservedly."

"Are you sure that you have?"

"It rests with you. There is no other evidence strong enough to bring me to justice."

"You are safe so far as I am concerned," said Phineas. "But I shall have to impose certain conditions."

Karakoff raised his hand. "First let me tell you what I voluntarily propose. I will draw up an estimate to cover the full value of all the war loot I have smuggled into this country, and on that figure the amount of what I have defrauded the customs. The first shall be repaid in personal contribution to French and Belgian relief funds. The latter—that is, the customs—shall be contributed to the American Red Cross. I will myself accept the loss of what I have paid out in purchase money, plus the revenue duties evaded. At a rough guess I should say that the whole sum may stand me in the neighborhood of half a million dollars."

"That sounds fair."

"Hold on! Against this there is a clean profit of at least as much again because the stuff was bought far below its intrinsic value. That must be figured in with the foreign contributions. I shall give you the certified checks for those amounts and you may mail them to the proper authorities. By doing this I shall have made full restitution and paid a penalty of about half a million dollars plus running expenses for my foolish ethical error."

Phineas stared at him in astonishment. "Do you mind telling me why you offer voluntarily so much more than I would have demanded?"

"Not in the least. It is because I am honestly sorry and ashamed of the business. I cannot say that my conscience has troubled me up to this time, but it certainly would have given me the devil if any ill had happened to you and Miss Melton. With me it is rather a matter of hurt pride and shame that I should have started such a scheme and had dealings with these filthy beasts. I am fastidious, rather haughty, if you like, and I am filled with self-disgust and desire to punish myself. After all it is no very great punishment, when all is said and done. I shall still be rich

enough, and proprietor of a profitable business."

"All the same, it strikes me that you are doing the thing pretty thoroughly."

"Partly gratitude at having cheated the jail if not the chair. But if you will pardon me for saying so, captain, your own methods are much less thorough. You have seriously endangered your life a number of times, you have killed off a swarm of poisonous human vermin, you have saved me from a ruin worse than death and by so doing will be the cause of bringing a considerable material benefit to a good many suffering war victims. And so far as concerns me, personally, God knows from what you may have saved my daughter. Yet you make no mention of any obligation due yourself."

"I have thought of that," Phineas answered slowly. "It seems to me that since I have muddled through and managed to accomplish what was required of me I am entitled to my year's pay and the bonus of fifty thousand."

Karakoff laughed outright: "Why the apologetic tone? Good Lord, man, do you think I shall let it go at that?"

"It's all I want. All I shall accept."

"I understand. Very well."

"Aside from that," said Phineas, "here's a proposition: Your line of trade is about the only one I've struck which I know anything about and which appeals to me. I'd like to put this fifty thousand into it and sign up on a partnership basis."

Karakoff laughed again—a light jovial laugh, its first notes of surprise melting into genuine amusement.

"My word, captain, but you carry about a sackful of jolts and hand me a fresh one every hour! There, I haven't had a laugh like that for months; didn't think I ever should again. Here I've been making the open confession that is said to be good for the soul and telling you what a rotter you've been working for, and more than half expecting that you'd want the whole thing in writing, duly signed and witnessed. Instead, you come along with a cheerful proposition of partnership. Do you really mean it? Would you go into partnership with a man who has done what I have?" He looked intently at Phineas, tugging at his crisp mustache. "What assurance have you of my future honesty except my work?"

"That's good enough for me. Even those thugs last night believed you to be a man of your word. They would scarcely have let you walk off with all the loot if they had not."

Karakoff drew down the corners of his mouth, as one who takes an ill-favored medicine.

"Well, as usual there appears to be method in your madness. But how do you know but what there may still be some loose end about the business? Something to crop up later and compromise you as my partner?"

"Can you think of anything of the sort?" Phineas asked.

Karakoff shook his head. "No," he answered slowly. "I do not see how——"

The telephone on the desk between them rang sharply. Karakoff moved forward to pick it up and thus held the instrument close to Phineas.

"Hello. . . . Yes, this is Karakoff.
. . . Hello, baron——"

The receiver was not pressed close against his ear and such was the harsh vibration of the voice at the other end that it would have been audible across the room. Phineas could not help but hear Rosenthal's startling words.

"I t'ought I should tell you that Olga iss in bad company. She is wit' two French crooks—a man und a voman. She and the voman got in the limousine of a big black car and I heard the man say in French to his chauffeur: 'Bay Ridge Yacht Club.' I vas caught in der jam beside dem in froont of the theater. Und say, Karakoff, if you see Ploonket tell him from me to look out for Mees Patricia M. It vas she, der voman—und she iss a cr-rook."

Chapter XX

ROSENTHAL'S telephone communication was abruptly broken. Karakoff was making desperate efforts to re-establish it, and even in the shock of what he could not help but overhear Phineas was struck by the sudden deathly pallor of the dealer's face, and the strained lines that formed about his fine eyes. It flashed through Phineas' mind that his daughter was the seat of Karakoff's soul. He had not lost a drop of color or quivered an eyelash at being confronted by his own danger; but at this maddeningly interrupted news of Olga he looked like a man who had met a shrapnel.

Then followed a minute or two of vain frenzied attempt to get Rosenthal again, with the usual buzz and rattle of the instrument punctuated by the whine of the operator, perfunctorily polite, infuriating in its deliberation. "Sa-a-ay—can't you get me that party that just'—— Wha' 'at?" Br-r-r-r-r—tup—tup—tup.

Karakoff turned his haggard face to Phineas. "Plunkett, did you hear that? . . . Hello—hello—you girl there, twenty dollars for you

DUDS

if you get me that party quick—the man just called.”

A minute passed. It seemed an hour. Phineas' mind was working quickly. “It looks like a holdup, Karakoff,” said he. “Miss Melton suspects something and has grabbed Olga. The Bay Ridge Yacht Club sounds like abducting her aboard a boat—a schooner—to put her where she can't be found and keep you out of the apartment all night hunting for her. Miss Melton is no crook, but she has requisitioned one of her yegg acquaintances for the job. She thinks you have records. She wants Olga's latchkey, her furs and furs maybe, to come back here with a French expert *cambricoleur* and overhaul the place while you are out looking for Olga.”

The half of Karakoff's head not on duty at the telephone snapped at this idea with eagerness. “I get you,” said he, and hung up the receiver. “Then I might as well sit tight until I hear from them.”

“Olga will probably call you up from some remote place in an hour or so. But if I have left the theater just before Rosenthal telephoned I can beat them to the Bay Ridge Yacht Club by the Subway and a taxi at

other end. You wait here. Put anything compromising in a place they can't find. This girl is after evidence and may have a swell French cracksman to help her. But they'd hardly tackle the burglar-proof safe in the lighted store. The chances are the house is watched to see if you go out, so you might as well follow instructions."

"Why not set a trap for them here? This girl may belong to the French Secret Service; and then again she may not. You never saw her papers. Perhaps she really is a crook. I've got a lot of faith in that old Czech. Anyhow she's got no license to kidnap a girl and search a mans' apartment over here."

"We don't know what she's got. If she's all right and we nail her or this bird working with her she'll have to come across with what happened last night. Better let them search the place and find nothing."

Karakoff nodded. "All right. You had better start. I'm in your hands. When it's a question of Olga I'll do anything."

"I'll take no chances—merely try to find out where they take her. *Au 'voir.*"

Thinking that the house might be watched Phineas went out onto the street in a leisurely

way, stood for a moment as if undecided whither to turn his steps and, a solitary taxi passing at that moment, he hailed it, got in and told the driver to go as fast as he could to the Fourteenth Street Subway station. He figured that by taking a South Brooklyn express and a taxi at the other end he could get to the yacht club considerably ahead of Patricia's car, which would cross the Brooklyn Bridge and have to thread its way through Brooklyn.

But before he had gone a block he was seized by one of those flashes of inspiration so aptly dubbed cab wit by the English and *esprit d'escalier* by the French, whose minds may work just that much quicker, the difference in time between the stairway and the cab.

For it struck him suddenly that the destination given their chauffeur by Patricia's aid was probably a blind. In the first place a pair planning the abduction of a young girl would not give their objective point audibly in the jam outside a theater. Again, for Rosenthal to have heard it he must have been close alongside, and if he was close alongside then Patricia's alert eyes could not possibly have failed to see him in the vivid glare of such a place. Patricia knew that Phineas was in touch with

Rosenthal, and Phineas had told her that very afternoon that it was Karakoff who had engaged his services.

Unquestionably she had counted on the keen old baron's recognition of both her companions and his acting precisely as he had done. More than that, her intention was to send Karakoff and probably Phineas also flying off on a fool's errand to distant Bay Ridge, there to wait and hunt aimlessly about while she put her plan, whatever that might be, in operation.

But to do this it would be necessary to detain Olga somewhere, and this was more than apt to be in her own apartment. How she had prevailed on Olga to accompany her Phineas could not imagine, but apparently she had managed it, and once having got the girl in her apartment would probably drug her wine or coffee. It was a high-handed piece of work and one which entailed a good deal of risk, but Phineas knew that Patricia was capable of running any chance to gain her ends.

Once having seized this idea he was convinced of its logic. At any rate he could pass by Patricia's apartment and if assured that it

was empty to go on to Bay Ridge. He picked up the tube, directed the driver to stop just round the corner from the address and when he had done so got out, paid double the fare and reserved the taxi for the next hour.

The light from Patricia's windows indicated that his judgment was correct. Halfway down the next block a big limousine car was drawn up to the curb, but Phineas knew that big limousines were frequent visitors to Greenwich Village. It is in fact a colony where all sorts of things may happen at almost any hour of the twenty-four, its habitants skilled in the art of minding their own business.

Phineas went softly up the steps and tried the door. It was locked. He pushed the button corresponding to the top story and after a moment's delay the latch clicked. He entered, went up the stairs and on passing Patricia's apartment heard a murmur of voices and a laugh which sounded like Olga's rather low-pitched voice. Arriving at the top story he saw a young man in a dressing gown standing expectantly on the threshold. He blinked inquiringly at his late caller.

"I beg your pardon," said Phineas in his

pleasant voice, "but does Mr. Jeremiah Taylor live here?"

The young man shook his head. "No, brother. I'm J. Livingston Taylor. 'Fraid you've got the wrong slip."

"Sorry," said Phineas. "He lives somewhere hereabouts. I've lost his number and they told me in the café on the corner that it might be here. Hope I haven't disturbed you."

"Not a bit. I don't happen to know any other Taylor in the village."

Phineas thanked him, went down again to the front door, opened and shut it with a slight slam, then stole softly back up the first flight and listened at Patricia's door. The murmur of voices was indistinct, coming from the little dining room, he thought, but he could recognize Olga's lilting laugh with her quick, animated manner of speaking. There were also the voluble tones of a man, their inflection unmistakably French. Then came the pop of a champagne cork.

For a moment Phineas was undecided how to act. It seemed to him rather preferable on the whole that Karakoff's apartment and little private safe should be searched and nothing

incriminating found, for he now felt convinced that such a measure was Patricia's object in luring Olga here. Phineas did not believe the girl to be in any danger, but he did not like the idea of her being drugged and he could not see how Patricia might hope to detain her in any other way. She would not care to use force, and no doubt she understood the administering of a narcotic. But Phineas knew that to get an immediate and profound effect upon a vigorous young person in full possession of all faculties a dose sufficiently large to be dangerous must be employed, and he did not want Olga to be exposed to this danger.

No, there was nothing else to do but interfere. There would be no danger to Olga in his doing so, and, besides, his automatic was in the side pocket of his coat. So he pressed the button. The talk and laughter were immediately hushed. There was no response to the summons. Several moments passed. Phineas began to wonder what he should do if Patricia chose utterly to ignore the bell. He rang again, then rapped. There was not the slightest response but it seemed to him that he heard low whispers for a second or two, fol-

lowed by the dull tinkling sound of a wineglass set down on bare wood.

An idea came to him, a ruse for obliging Patricia to open the door. He could imagine her rage at his employing it, but this was the least of his cares. He rapped again, then with his lips close to the crevice called gayly: "I say Patricia, let me come to the party, please. It's I, Phineas Plunkett."

As he had expected he heard a sudden exclamation from Olga. "Why, it's Phœbe! Do let him in, Miss Melton!"

Phineas permitted himself a dry grin, not only at the success of his forcing Patricia's hand but at Olga's impulsive and thoughtless support of it. He fancied that on a moment's reflection she might not be so pleased at his midnight call on Patricia.

But the point was gained. Patricia came to the door, opened it, and faced Phineas with such yellow fury in her eyes that his muscles instinctively tightened. She may not have suspected the real motive of his coming—given it a softer one or thought that something might have happened which he desired to tell her of in connection with their affair. But it did not matter. His importunity, insist-

ence, bawling out her name and his, at that time and place, must have seemed to her to have a single explanation. And her quick wit seized at it as a means for getting rid of him.

"What do you mean by coming here at this time?" she cried, her voice low but audible to the others. "I thought I made it plain this afternoon that I wished never to see you again. And you have been drinking! Go away! You are drunk!"

She stepped across the threshold and her arm shot out, not as a woman strikes but the straight drive of a trained pugilist at the angle of the jaw. Swift, sudden, unexpected as it was, Phineas might have been caught napping if it had not been for the blaze in her eyes which preceded it by the fraction of a second. He felt it coming just as she struck, and jerked his head aside, at the same time lurching forward. Her long bare arm shot over his shoulder and he thrust himself past her through the door.

Patricia did not renew her attack. She turned swiftly, her face chalky except for the crimson incision of her mouth.

"Oh, well, if you will insist"—the astonish-

ing change to her customary limpid voice was more startling to Phineas than her sudden vicious attack—"but I must say you have not much regard for my reputation, coming here at this hour."

Then, no doubt to her intense surprise, Phineas lurched back against the wall, jerked his head up in a drunken way and answered thickly: "'S not so lat's all that. Thought you might like to do a cab'ret, 'r Midnight Follies 'r somethin'."

Patricia's eyes widened. She stared at him for an instant astonished, with a look of alarm. So he actually was drunk! Perhaps it was his failing, his weakness! She wondered that she had not thought of it before, that afternoon. He might be addicted to periodical sprees and now in the relaxation from the strain of the last few days fairly started upon one of them. Her look of alarm, for she was not trying now to mask her expression, changed to doubt, relief, a swift flash of purpose. She laid her hand on his arm.

"Try to pull yourself together," she whispered. "Don't give anything away."

"No danger, m'dear. Thought I heard Olga's voice."

"Sh-h-h! Come in, and keep hold of yourself."

She led him into the little salon which adjoined the dining room. On the bare table was a bubbling chafing dish, two open half bottles of champagne and three glasses. There was an odor of grilled sardines. Olga, very beautiful in a décolleté evening gown, was leaning forward in her chair with an unusual flush of her mat skin and a look of startled displeasure. There was a line straight down between her brows, and her eyes had a vague but strained expression as though she were making an effort to concentrate.

Beside her sat a trim broad-shouldered man in full dress and with the red ribbon of the Legion of Honor in his lapel. His features were aquiline, rather handsome but not pleasing because asymmetrical, one eye seeming larger than the other, one nostril more dilated as though from a slight facial hemiplegia, possibly the result of a wound to a facial nerve. He wore a closely trimmed Vandyke and was dark of complexion, almost swarthy. He stared at Phineas with an ill-concealed hostility.

"'Llo, Olga," said Phineas, and gave a lit-

tle cough. "Didn't know you and Miss Melton were acquainted."

Olga nodded with a curious little jerk of her head, as though the wine had already mounted to it. She moistened her lips, looked a little distressed and answered coldly: "Good evening, Captain Plunkett."

Patricia with a deprecating smile as though in apology for her uninvited guest made an audible introduction of the two men. The name sounded to Phineas like Comte de Varignac. His own was acknowledged by a curt nod. The situation was decidedly strained, but Phineas affected not to notice it. That in fact was the least of his worries, of which the pressing one was Olga. It was plainly evident to him that the girl was already fighting and fighting hard against the action of some drug, unsuspectingly of course.

"I'll get you a glass, captain," said Patricia, and went into the kitchenette. "That bottle is a little corked, I think. We'll have a fresh one."

She spoke in French. The count rose to his feet. "Let me open it, mademoiselle," said he, and went to the door, where he stood with his broad back to the dining room, effectually

screening the place. Phineas could guess what sort of refreshment was in course of preparation for him. He dropped his pretense of intoxication and leaned across the table toward Olga. She stared at him with the same dazed, stricken look, frowning, making as he could see a tremendous effort to keep possession not only of her visual sense but her mental faculties as well. Her small hands were resting on the table, clenched, and glancing down Phineas saw that there was some object in one of them.

Her head gave another violent jerk. She recovered herself, drew a quick breath, and a frightened look filled her light gray eyes.

"Oh, Phœbe—I—I feel so queer."

"It's the wine—and the heat. Take a few deep breaths. It will pass." He laid his hand on the back of hers—the one that held the cobalt-blue object of which he could see gleam between her fingers. As if finding comfort in his touch, seeking its protection, her hand turned upward in his.

"What's this?"

"I—I don't know. Something papa found in the secret drawer of a little antique escri-

Chapter XXI

FOR the first time since the beginning of his strange adventure Phineas knew the icy clutch of cold fear. At no other time had he felt really afraid. In the motor boat the danger had been so purely physical, one might almost say wholesome, that there went with it a thrill and zest, while the night before while waiting to dispense justice to a trio of potential murderers he had been anything but frightened at the prospect; nervous and a little sickened, perhaps, but no more afraid than the silent headsman.

But now he was afraid. There was a malignant inhumanity about the pair with whom he had now to deal which lent them a dread outside the material. They seemed to be vampire mates, and there was something monstrous in the mere idea of a vampire's having a mate. To Phineas at this moment the female monster was more horrid than the male, more poignantly evil because of a finer texture. The he beast might cling to the bleeding tissue with pulpy lips to nourish his materialized entity; the she thing would suck at the soul itself to cloy her appetite.

To make his terror more concrete, here was Olga lying unconscious across the table; but her presence there and utter helplessness yet served to steady his nerve while adding to his fear. He was bewildered too; could not grasp the situation. If ever foul purpose was stamped on the simulacra of human faces it was on those of this couple, and Phineas could not see why. There did not seem to be enough at stake, sufficient warrant for their venom. He now believed that their motive in luring Olga away and getting Karakoff out of the apartment was not to search for evidence but merely for the sake of loot, and so far as the blue stone was concerned Phineas knew enough about minerals to be convinced that it could not possibly have any considerable value. It did not even look like good enamel, being dull and muddy and full of flaws.

All of this went through Phineas' brain like three swift consecutive flashes of a moving picture—the instinctive sense of deadly danger; anguish of dread for Olga, who might, he thought, be dying; perplexity about the motive of these two denizens of slime. Then he

acted, and so quickly as to take even their unhallowed acuteness by surprise.

He sprang back, whipped out his pistol and held it muzzle upward, ready to cut down on either one of them.

"One shot," said he, "and the police will have you both. Your plan has failed."

A swift look passed between the two. Then Patricia laughed.

"Listen to our boy scout! My little Phœbe, do you think that we are thieves?"

"I don't think anything about it. I know that you are thieves. You may be an agent of the French Secret Service and a journalist and Lord knows what besides. All that won't save you. You have poisoned Olga. If she dies you go to the chair. If she recovers you may go free. Now get out!"

"How nice of you to let us go, my Phœbe."

"Stand still. I shall now count ten, and if you are still here when I finish I shall kill you both. The first shot will bring the police. If there is no shot you are free to go. Pass round the table, monsieur, and go out the door. Mademoiselle will follow you. Now start. One—two——"

"Fool! Idiot!"

"Three—four——"

"Give me that piece of enamel and we will go. It has no value."

"Five ——"

"We want it for evidence against one who has betrayed us," snarled the man.

"Six ——"

Quivering like one in the premonitory aura of a convulsion the count moved round the table. Phineas stepped back to let Patricia pass. Her step was steady. The man stopped.

"Go on!" hissed Patricia. "The imbecile will shoot!"

"Seven ——"

They crossed the salon.

"Eight ——"

The count flung open the door.

"Nine ——"

He passed through. Patricia followed, turned on the threshold and favored Phineas with a terrible smile.

"A bientôt, mon ami. We shall meet again."

She went out. Phineas slammed shut the door and sprang aside in case of a bullet through it. But no shot was fired. He waited a moment, heard the front door slam, then stepped to the salon window and looked

out. Their two dark figures were moving down the street in the direction of the car which he had seen on the next block. Patricia looked up and waved her hand.

"Good night," she called.

Weak of knee and the lights dancing before his eyes Phineas went to Olga and lifting her as best he could half dragged her into the salon, where he laid her on the divan. Though it was evident that she was profoundly drugged her condition did not impress him as alarming, for there was color to her lips, her hands were not too cold, and the action of her heart and her breathing were labored but fairly strong.

Phineas loosened all that might hamper respiration, then covered her with a steamer rug and her long fur coat and opened the windows.

He hunted for a telephone, but there was none in the apartment. Naturally he wished to avoid publicity and did not dare leave the place for a minute's time. It was possible that the pair, whom he had bluffed into nonresistance by his threat of the police, might suspect this and slink back. Unquestionably they had some vital reason for wishing to get pos-

session of that curious chunk of enamel, though this could not have been their motive in drugging Olga, who had been told by Simondson, the society pawnbroker and expert in precious gems, that it was of no appreciable value.

It was probable, Phineas thought, that Patricia had found reason to suspect Karakoff as being the head of the smuggling system and the person who had been in Durand's room and carried off the precious contents of the safe. She may have reasoned that he would not be apt to place these with the listed articles of his stock in the big safe of the store, but in his private one upstairs. The scheme, then, was pure and simple burglary. She herself would stay in the apartment with Olga, force champagne upon the girl, persuade her later that they had both drunk too much, while the "count," an expert cracksman no doubt, furnished with Olga's latch key, would go through Karakoff's dwelling. Perhaps also they had hoped to find this chunk of enamel, on which they seemed to place such value, with the other loot. Olga's possession of it at that moment might have been mere accident.

Convinced that this must be the true solu-

tion Phineas felt infinitely relieved. For in such a case Patricia would have been careful not to drug Olga dangerously. A fresh inspection of the girl seemed to corroborate this. She looked and breathed more like a lovely sleeping child than a person under the influence of a powerful narcotic. There was an exquisite infantile quality in her face which stirred Phineas deeply; roused his fine protective instincts and a sort of tenderness. This was the second time that he had stepped between this girl and harsh usage. It gave him a curious proprietary sense.

It occurred to him as he watched her slow breathing that perhaps he ought to be making some effort to revive her, slapping and shaking and forcing strong coffee down her throat. But common sense prevailed. As long as her condition remained good, why not leave her in peace to sleep off the drug as much as possible? He had not the slightest intention of running the risk of leaving the place until broad daylight with light and movement in the streets. His strategic position was all that could be desired. From where he sat at Olga's side nobody could enter that little apartment without his official safe-conduct.

Two hours passed. Somewhere in the neighborhood a clock struck three. Olga's condition was unchanged, so far as Phineas could ascertain. Her breathing was a little longer, less labored. He drew back the coverings and laid his ear over her heart. It was pumping along like a good little motor. Phineas felt her hands and feet. The latter seemed cold to his touch, so he went into the kitchenette, heated some water on the gas stove, filled the champagne bottles and placed them where they would do some real good. Then with the Yankee practicality which was his birthright he proceeded to make some coffee that would have curled the hair of a Javanese, and ate the grilled sardines.

He put on his overcoat and sat down at Olga's side to wait for the day. This did not prove tedious because he had for contemplation the beautiful girl and his not unpleasant thoughts. Studying the perfect childish face with solicitude he was inclined to think that Olga might have passed gently from the influence of the narcotic into a natural sleep; precisely as Patricia had intended, perhaps. She did not look like a person drugged and

Phineas did not believe that it would be difficult to rouse her when the time came.

This vigil began to have a curious effect, the drawing out of a newborn tenderness. There is something in the bedside watching of a stricken person which does this to one of kindly soul. The physician has it, and the nurse. The "buddy" feels it keenly; even an enemy may feel it for a stricken foe whom humanity forbids him to abandon to his fate. It is perhaps the strongest of all instincts next to the maternal, and for the simple reason that it approaches that. Often it leads to love, parental, filial or that which makes the world go round.

It was perhaps a combination of all three which now began to stir and burgeon in Phineas. He had been really stirred by Olga's naïve declaration, because he could not help but feel its absolute sincerity. Coming at that time when nearly disillusionized of previous taken-for-granted ideas on friendship it was as though on passing from the interment of something he had felt to be immortal a strange child had offered him a rose.

He had not taken the flower, but neither had he declined it. Olga had kept it for him.

In a way she had offered it again that night when in her growing distress she had turned her hand upward to clasp his, and this curious object which seemed to have been on the verge of precipitating slaughter had slipped into it. "Oh, Phœbe—I—I feel so queer." The plaintive appeal had probably saved them both, nerved Phineas to strong action, banished his dread of devils like an exorcism.

What sort of talisman could this thing be? Phineas took it from his pocket and examined it curiously. Patricia, that she werewolf, whom that afternoon he had in his simplicity endowed with the soul of Javert, had said that it was the shackle in a chain of evidence against a traitor.

Be that as it might the turbid coagulum, which looked like the slag from a crucible of enamel, was not much of a shackle. It struck Phineas that such a thing of no beauty but containing potentialities of mischief had better be destroyed.

He took out his pocketknife and trying the point of a blade found that it scratched to steel, with some difficulty, where apparently impure. He gave it a smart tap with the back of the knife. A tiny spicule chipped off.

No precious stone could be scratched by steel or laminate from a slight rap. He cupped the thing in the hollow of his hand and dealt it a smarter blow. The lacquerlike stuff shivered on the surface, split off in flakes from a harder nucleus beneath. He rapped it again, and the blue muddy cortex seemed to exfoliate, to peel away; and as it did so there flashed from his palm a pale blue lambent flame.

It flared in his eyes—pure, dazzling, incandescent, like the freed soul embodied in millions of tons of inanimate matter concentrated in a glorious gem. Dazed, bewildered, almost frightened, he gripped at it, turning its many facets, and tongues of fire leaped out between his fingers. Dominating them was the blue, but wondrous tones and overtones of blue, which ran a chromatic scale undreamed of by artists. And the stored fire had taken a mountain, a volcano to produce.

Phineas stared at this prodigy aghast. He recognized it from the description given him by its legitimate owner. Rosenthal too had given him its quality.

"If you should r-reach up in der sky some br-right night in der tropics, and haul down a star vat tinkles long blue tongues of flame—vell, that is the Sultana!"

Chapter XXII

A VERY beautiful dawn was breaking on the artificial crags of Manhattan. The late-winter sunrise was a little slow to invade South Grove Street. Perhaps it felt that there was still plenty of time in that quarter.

Olga stirred beneath her furs. Phineas cocking his head alertly caught a murmur to the effect that she was not yet ready for her coffee. The words were Spanish, but he understood. She was telling Karakoff's Filipino butler that he was bringing her coffee too soon. Phineas had shut the windows and Patricia's apartment was redolent of coffee; fifty-fifty coffee—which is to say, half coffee, half water, by bulk.

Phineas smiled and shoved his automatic back into his pocket. Since undressing the Sultana and gazing impassioned on her nudity he had sat the rest of the morning with his pistol in hand, rather expecting an attack by storm. This not having happened he had come to the conclusion that crooks were really cowards at heart.

Olga turned on her side, opened her eyes in a deliberate way and stared at Phineas as

though not at all surprised to see him there. This to the intelligent observer would seem to indicate that he had been the companion of her dreams. Patricia's drug must have been potent and swift of action, but pure, for it left no trace of lethargy or mental confusion. Naturally enough the girl gazed round the room in considerable astonishment and, as her faculties cleared, with a good deal more of this at Phineas, who smiled at her cheerfully.

"Phœbe—what's happened to me?"

"Drink this and I'll tell you. How do you feel?"

"All right. But everything looks a little blurred and there's a queer, sweetish taste in my mouth. It seems as if I'd been asleep a week." A crimson flush crept up into her face. "I had the most wonderful dreams—beautiful places; and flowers and everything in bright gorgeous colors; and—and ——"

She stopped, let fall her eyes, looked suddenly abashed.

"Go wash out that taste and bathe your face and then drink this coffee," said Phineas. "Then I'll tell you all about it."

Olga obeyed. "Hashish," thought Phineas to himself. He had once read something

about the action of *cannibis indica* and remembered the mention of pleasurable color dreams and the sense of long elapsed time as the most pronounced effects of the drug. Trust Patricia to administer something subtle and out of the ordinary. No crude and dangerous knockout drops for this finished artist in crime.

When Olga returned he saw that she was in the grip of an overwhelming embarrassment. As the girl saw it she must have succumbed to the champagne, spent the night on the divan in drunken sleep with Phineas acting as special attendant, Patricia being evidently called away on some imperative errand. Shame overpowered her, filled her eyes with tears of mortification. She felt that Phineas was lost to her forever. But he did not leave her long in distress.

"Cheer up, Olga. It's not your fault. That rotten pair doped your champagne. They are crooks, expert thieves and safe breakers. Their object was to get you and your father out of the apartment so as to go through it. Rosenthal saw you leave the theater with them and wised us up over the phone. I was with your father at the time and guessed that the Melton woman had brought you here."

"Phœbe!"

"Yes. When you went down and out I marched them off at the point of a gun. They wanted that chunk of enamel too."

"But why?"

"They knew what it really was. Look!"

He reached in his pocket, held out his hand, the great diamond filling its palm. The early sun rays were gathered to the heart of the luminous crystal, there to be concentrated and intensified and shot out in flashing bands of cerulean blue. And close about it a nimbus glowed and quivered with a palpitating light, as though the wondrous gem were living and breathing, and seemed to say: "Look on my naked beauty with care to your soul, for I am the Sultana."

Olga shrieked. "What is it? Oh, Phœbe—what is that? The Sultana ——"

"Yes. I think it must be the Sultana, the big blue diamond Rosenthal gave to the Marquise d'Irancy as a wedding present, which was taken from her by the German officer. Somebody dipped it in enamel or fused it over with cobalt or something of the sort. I tapped it with my knife and the stuff cracked off like the shell of a hazelnut. This is what

these beasts were after—no doubt what brought the Melton woman over here. They got on the trail of it in some way, suspected that it was in your father's possession. If they had thought I was going to find out what it was some of us would never have got out of here alive. How did you happen to come here with them?"

"Miss Melton was in the Simondsons' theater party last night. She knew them in London. In the first entr'acte the Count de Valignac came into the box and she introduced him. They were all going for supper afterward, but I said that I was not feeling very well and asked to be excused."

"Why?"

"Because I had heard papa ask a messenger if the gentleman was at the hotel, and I thought that perhaps you might be coming."

"Kid! Well, what then?"

"Miss Melton said that she had to leave as soon as the play was over and that she would drop me on the way. Then the count met us in the foyer and offered to take us in his car. Just as we left she asked if I would mind coming here first, as she was anxious to see if there was any message for her, and I couldn't

very well refuse. They insisted on a bite to eat and a glass of champagne. The rest you know."

Phineas nodded. "Did you notice anything peculiar about the champagne?"

"Yes. It seemed very sweet and fizzy, but I didn't like to criticize. I thought it must be rather poor wine. Oh, Phœbe—what if you hadn't come!"

"Nothing would have happened to you, my dear. They were after the Sultana and would have got away with it."

"Isn't it wonderful? Oh, dear!" Her voice grew plaintive. "And now I suppose you think me more of a helpless little fool than ever!"

"I think you are a darling."

"What?"

"That seems to be the word. I've been giving it a good deal of thought for the last five or six hours. It is also very certain that though your father may love you to death he takes rotten poor care of you. He does not know how. You ought to have a nurse—or a husband, and quick!"

"Oh, my dear!"

Olga's breathing would have alarmed

Phineas if she had still been under the influence of Indian hemp. But her trouble at that moment was some far more potent elixir in the disturbance of time values and colorful joy dreams. She made rather a distracting vision of loveliness herself, sitting there on the edge of the divan in décolleté evening gown under the cold and critical examination of a frigid March dawn. Phineas certainly found something about her which laid upon him the imperative demand for a great deal of immediate care.

Chapter XXIII

THE tall clock in Karakoff's study voiced the full Westminster chimes, then solemnly struck six. To the dealer it sounded like the knell of such real happiness as up to this time life had held for him. His chin sank upon his chest.

Over against him in a great prelate's chair loomed the huge figure of the Baron de Rosenthal—massive, incongruous, almost grotesque in his immaculate evening dress, with the enormous and impassive face of some ferocious pagan idol set like an ancient ivory mask above a vast expanse of snowy shirt front. From the slow-burning end of his long black cigar a tenuous thread of smoke rose straight as a plumb line, to dissipate about his immobile head like incense burned before a joss.

Karakoff raised his pale haggard face and looked at this silent comforter. "You're a mighty good sort to stick it out with me, baron," said he, "but really you had better go back to your hotel and turn in. There's nothing now but to wait."

"Den let us vait. Everything comes to him who waits. I haf tried it and it is so. I do

not mind vaiting. I like you, and I am sorry for you. I hate to see a good man go wrong—and den find it out so late.”

“What could they possibly have wanted of her?” Karakoff demanded for the twentieth time. “Her maid says she wore no valuable jewels.” He passed his hand across his eyes. “Plunkett was wrong. Nobody has been here, and God knows they had time enough while we were scouring Bay Ridge. We were certainly followed, and it must have been reported.”

“Do not despair, my friendt. I have mooch fait’ in this young man. He may haf put their business on the blink. He iss a good poy.”

“He could always have telephoned—if he was still alive.”

“He is all r-right. I feel it in my bones. Dose Amer-ican poys like him are more hard to kill than cr-rooks like dis scum of Chu-Chu’s. My yoong friend Dallás was like him—and Fr-rank Clamart. I should vorry.”

“Don’t you think I’d better call up police headquarters?”

“No. You do not vant dem arrested. You have not’ing certain on dem—and you do not

know what dey may or may not have on you. Vait."

"This waiting will drive me mad."

"Gif Ploonket time. Py chingo, that poy is not the fool he looks. It vas my fault. I should haf stopped t'em. But I did not know. I suspected you. Besides, I haf made a life study of minding my own business."

Karakoff groaned. That's what comes of getting tangled up in dirty work. And Plunkett and I tossing bouquets back and forth and discussing plans for the future, all so *couleur de rose*. You don't suppose that chunk of enamel Olga took to show Simondson could have had anything to do with it?"

Rosenthal's tufty eyebrows went up an inch or so. "I do not see how. You say it looked like der skum off a crucible? No. It was somet'ing else. Listen!"

There came the noise of an opening door—the front door. Karakoff sprang to his feet. Somebody had entered the ante-chamber. There was a low rippling laugh, a subdued but joyous laugh. Karakoff gave a cry.

"Olga!"

He tottered on his feet, lurched forward. Rosenthal did not move. He sat there as

passive as the Daibutsu Buddha at Kamagura, but his mottled eyes twinkled and the deep scorings of his harsh features were marvelously softened.

"Papa, dear—yes, we are both here. It's all right. I've had a *nuit blanche*. They drugged me. But Phœbe ——"

She rushed forward and was caught in the strong arms of her repentant parent.

They went into the study, where Rosenthal, not moving from his throne, examined them with twinkling eyes.

"Vell, my poy, and vat haf you to report? Haf you slaughtered Chu-Chu's familiar? And Mademoiselle Eut'anasie?"

"Mademoiselle what, baron?"

"That is her *petit nom* in the underworld. Miss Happy Death. I haf looked her up. I sent some cables to my old fr-riendt, Frank Clamart, of Paris. I t'aught she vas a cr-rook, and I vas r-right. I am not always r-right any more, because I am getting old and lazy, but I half still a *flair* for a cr-rook."

"Have you a *flair* for a treasure, baron?"

The big mottled eyes twinkled more than ever. "I t'nk so. To look at you two kids I would say you had found one."

"I've found two baron." Phineas' hand went into the side pocket of his coat. "Madame d'Irancy has got a happy day ahead. Did you ever see this rock before?"

He held out his hand. The baron gave one look. Up went the great bushy eyebrows a full three inches, the brown-mottled eyes bulging like those of a strangled calf. His jaw dropped, the yellow teeth with their curious concavity upward were like those of an ogre.

And then there burst from his great chest a yell that struck the others like the blast of a ship's siren.

He sprang from the chair, flung up his arms, rose upon his tiptoes and whirled like a Rufaiyah dervish.

"My poy! My Yankee poy!" he bellowed. "Py chingo, der Sultana!"

Rf

[THE END]



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